

A SECOND
LETTER
TO THE
Bishop of BANGOR;
WHEREIN
His Lordship's NOTIONS
OF
*Benediction, Absolution, and
Church-Communion,*
Are prov'd to be Destructive of every
Institution of the *Christian Religion.*

To which is Added, A
POSTSCRIPT,
In Answer to the OBJECTIONS that
have been made against his former Letter.

By WILLIAM LAW, M. A.

THE FOURTH EDITION.

LONDON:

Printed for W. INNYS and R. MANBY, at the West
End of St. Paul's Church-yard. MDCCXXXVII.

Price One Shilling.

A SECOND

EDITION

OF THE

Principles of Education

WITH

AN APPENDIX

containing the Report of the
Committee on the

Education of the People

POSTSCRIPT

TO THE REPORT

OF THE COMMITTEE

ON THE EDUCATION

OF THE PEOPLE

OF 1861

AND

OF 1862

OF 1863



My LORD,



Just Concern for Truth, and the First Principles of the Christian Religion, was the only Motive that engag'd me in the Examination of your Lordship's Doctrines in a former Letter to your Lordship. And the same Motive I hope, will be thought a sufficient Apology for my presuming to give your Lordship the Trouble of a Second Letter.

Amongst the Vain Contemptible Things, whereof your Lordship would create an Abhorrence in the Laity, are, the *Trifles* and *Niceties* of *Authoritative Benedictions, Absolutions, Excommunications* *. Again, you say, that *to expect the Grace of God from any Hands, but his own, is to affront him* —†. And that *all depends upon God and ourselves; That Human Benedictions, Human Absolutions, Human Excommunications, have nothing to do with the Favour of God* ||.

It is evident from these Maxims (for your Lordship asserts them as such) that whatever Institutions are observed in any Christian Society, upon this Supposition, that thereby Grace is conferr'd thro' *Human Hands*, or by the Ministry of the Clergy, such Institutions ought to be condemn'd, and are condemn'd by your Lordship, as *trifling, useless, and affronting to God*.

There is an *Institution*, my Lord, in the yet Establish'd Church of *England*, which we call *Confirmation*: It is founded upon the exprefs Words of Scripture, Primitive Observance, and the Universal Practice of all succeeding Ages in the Church. The Design of this Institution is, that it should be a Means

A 2

of

* *Preservative*, p. 98. † P. 89. || P. 101.

of conferring Grace, by the Prayer and Imposition of the *Bishop's Hands* on those who have been already Baptiz'd. But yet against all this Authority, both Divine and Human, and the express Order of our own Church, your Lordship teaches the Laity, *that all Human Benedictions are useless Niceties*; and *that to expect God's Grace from any Hands but his own, is to affront him.*

If so, my Lord, what shall we say in Defence of the Apostles? We read (*Acts* 8. 14.) that when *Philip* the Deacon had baptized the *Samaritans*, the Apostles sent *Peter* and *John* to them, who having pray'd, and *laid their Hands on them, they receiv'd the Holy Ghost, who before was fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus.*

My Lord, several things are here out of Question; *First*, That something else, even in the Apostolical Times, was necessary, besides Baptism, in order to qualify Persons to become compleat Members of the Body, or Partakers of the Grace of Christ. They had been baptized, yet did not receive the Holy Ghost, till the Apostles Hands were laid upon them. *2dly*, That God's Graces are not only conferr'd by means of *Human Hands*, but of some particular Hands, and not others. *3dly*, That this Office was so strictly appropriated to the Apostles, or Chief Governors of the Church, that it could not be perform'd by inspir'd Men, tho' empower'd to work Miracles, who were of an inferior Order; as *Philip* the Deacon. *4thly*, That the Power of the Apostles for the Performance of this Ordinance, was entirely owing to their superior Degree in the Ministry, and not to any extraordinary Gifts they were endow'd with: For then *Philip* might have perform'd it; who was not wanting in those Gifts, being himself an Evangelist, and Worker of Miracles: Which is a Demonstration that his Incapacity arose from his inferior Degree in the Ministry.

And

And now, my Lord, are all *human Benedictions Niceties and Trifles*? Are the Means of God's Grace in his *own Hands alone*? Is it wicked, and *affronting to God*, to suppose the contrary? How then comes *Peter* and *John* to confer the Holy Ghost by the Imposition of their Hands? How comes it, that they appropriate this Office to themselves? Is the Dispensation of God's Grace in his *own Hands alone*? And yet can it be dispens'd to us by the Ministry of some Persons, and not by that of others?

Were the Apostles so wicked, as to distinguish themselves by a Pretence to vain Powers, which God had reserved to himself? And which your Lordship supposes from the Title of your *Preservative*, that it is inconsistent with *common Sense*, to imagine that God would or could have communicated to Men.

Had any of your Lordship's well-instructed Laitie liv'd in the Apostles Days, with what Indignation must they have rejected this senseless chimerical *Claim* of the Apostles? They must have said, Why do you, *Peter* or *John*, pretend to this *Blasphemous Power*? *Whilst we believe the Gospel, we cannot expect the Grace of God from any Hands but his own.* You give us the *Holy Ghost*! You confer the Grace of God! Is it not impious to think, that *he should make our Improvement* in Grace depend upon your Ministry; or hang our Salvation on any *particular Order* of Clergymen? We know, that God is Just, and Good, and True, and *that all depends upon Him and ourselves*, and that *human Benedictions are Trifles*. Therefore whether you *Peter*, or you *Philip*, or both, or neither of you lay *your Hands* upon us, we are neither better nor worse; but just in the *same State of Grace* as we were before.

This Representation has not one Syllable in it, but what is founded in your Lordship's Doctrine, and perfectly agreeable to it.

The late most Pious and Learned Bishop *Beveridge* has these remarkable Words upon *Confirmation* :

“ How any Bishops in our Age dare neglect so considerable a Part of their Office, I know not; but fear they will have no good Account to give of it, *when they come to stand before God's Tribunal* *.”

But we may justly, and therefore I hope, with Decency, ask your Lordship, how you dare perform this Part of your Office? For you have condemn'd it as *Trifling* and *Wicked*; as *Trifling*, because it is an *human Benediction*; as *Wicked*, because it supposes Grace conferr'd by the *Hands of the Bishop*. If therefore any baptiz'd Persons should come to your Lordship for Confirmation, if you are *sincere* in what you have deliver'd, your Lordship ought, I humbly conceive, to make them this Declaration :

“ My Friends, for the sake of *Decency* and *Order*, I have taken upon me the Episcopal Character; and, according to Custom, which has long prevail'd against common Sense, am now to lay my Hands upon you: But, I beseech you, as you have any Regard to the Truth of the Gospel, or to the Honour of God, not to imagine there is any thing in this Action, more than an uselefs empty Ceremony: For if you expect to have any Spiritual Advantage from *human Benedictions*, or to receive Grace from the Imposition of a Bishop's Hands, you affront God, and in effect, renounce Christianity.”

Pray, my Lord, consider that Passage in the Scripture where the Apostle speaks of *Leaving the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ, and going on unto Perfection*; not laying again the Foundation of Repentance from dead Works, of Faith towards God, of the Doctrine of Baptisms, and of Laying on of Hands, and of the Resurrection of the Dead, and of eternal Judgment, (Heb. vi. 1, 2.)

My

* *First Volume of Sermons.*

My Lord, here it is undeniably plain, that this Laying on of Hands (which is with us called *Confirmation*) is so fundamental a Part of Christ's Religion, that it is called one of the first Principles of the Doctrine of Christ; and is placed amongst such primary Truths, as the Resurrection of the Dead, and of Eternal Judgment.

St. Cyprian speaking of this Apostolical Imposition of Hands, says, *The same is now practis'd with us; they who have been baptiz'd in the Church, are brought to the Presidents of the Church, that by our Prayer and Imposition of Hands, they may receive the Holy Ghost, and be consummated with the Lord's Seal.*

And must we yet believe, that all *human Benedictions* are Dreams, and the Imposition of human Hands trifling and useless; and that to expect God's Graces from them, is to affront him? Though the Scriptures expressly teach us, that God confers his Grace by means of certain *particular human Hands*, and not of others; tho' they tell us, this *human Benediction*, this Laying on of Hands, is one of the first Principles of the Religion of Christ, and as much a Foundation-Doctrine as the Resurrection of the Dead, and Eternal Judgment; and tho' every Age since that of the Apostles, has strictly observ'd it as such, and the Authority of our own Church still requires the Observance of it?

I come now, my Lord, to another sacred and Divine Institution of Christ's Church, which stands exposed and condemn'd by your Lordship's Doctrine; and that is, the *Ordination* of the Christian Clergy; where, by means of an human Benediction, and the Imposition of the Bishop's Hands, the Holy Ghost is supposed to be conferr'd on Persons towards consecrating them for the Work of the Ministry.

We find it constantly taught by the Scriptures, that all Ecclesiastical Authority, and the Graces whereby the Clergy are qualified and enabled to ex-

ercise their Functions to the Benefit of the Church, are the Gifts and Graces of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Apostle exhorts the Elders *to take heed unto the Flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made them Overseers*, (Eph. iv. 7.) But how, my Lord, had the Holy Ghost made them Overseers, but by the laying on of the Apostles Hands? They were not immediately call'd by the Holy Ghost; but being consecrated by *such human Hands* as had been authoriz'd to that Purpose, they were as truly call'd by him, and sanctified with Grace for that Employment, as if they had receiv'd an immediate or miraculous Commission. So again, St. Paul puts Timothy in mind *to stir up the Gift of God that was in him, by laying on of his Hands*, (2 Tim. ii. 6.)

And now, my Lord, if *human Benedictions* be such idle *Dreams* and *Trifles*; if it be *affronting to God*, to expect his Graces from them, or through *human Hands*; do we not plainly want new Scriptures? Must we not give up the Apostles as furious High-Church Prelates, who aspir'd to presumptuous Claims, and talk'd of conferring the Graces of God by their own Hands? Was not this Doctrine as strange and unaccountable then, as at present? Was it not as inconsistent with the Attributes and Sovereignty of God at that Time, to have his Graces pass through other Hands than his own, as in any succeeding Age? Nay, my Lord, where shall we find any Fathers or Councils, in the primitive Church, but who own'd and asserted these Powers? They that were so ready to part with their Lives, rather than do the least Dishonour to God, or the Christian Name, yet were all guilty of *this horrid Blasphemy*, in imagining that they were to bless in God's Name; and that by the Benediction and laying on of the Bishop's Hands, the Graces of the Holy Ghost could be conferr'd on any Persons.

Agreeable

Agreeable to the Sense of Scripture and Antiquity, our Church uses this Form of Ordination: *The Bishop laying his Hands on the Person's Head, saith, Receive the Holy Ghost, for the Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God, committed unto thee, by the Imposition of our Hands.* From this Form, it is plain, *First*, That our Church holds, that the Reception of the Holy Ghost is necessary to constitute a Person a Christian Priest. *Secondly*, That the Holy Ghost is conferr'd through *human Hands*. *Thirdly*, That it is by the Hands of a Bishop that the Holy Ghost is conferr'd.

If, therefore, your Lordship is right in your Doctrine, the Church of *England* is evidently most corrupt: For if it be dishonourable and affronting to God, to expect his Grace from any human Hands; it must of Necessity be dishonourable and affronting to him for a Bishop to pretend to confer it by his Hands. And can that Church be any ways defended, that has establish'd such an Iniquity by Law, and made the Form of it so necessary? How can your Lordship answer it to your Laity, for taking the Character or Power of a Bishop from such a Form of Words? You tell them it is affronting to God, to expect his Grace from *human Hands*; yet, to qualify your self for a Bishoprick, you let human Hands be laid on you, after a Manner which directly supposes you thereby receive the Holy Ghost! Is it wicked in them to expect it from *human Hands*? And is it less so in your Lordship, to pretend to receive it from human Hands? He that believes it is affronting to God, to expect his Grace from human Hands, must likewise believe, that our Form of Ordination, which promises the Holy Ghost by the *Bishop's Hands*, must be also affronting to God. Certainly he cannot be said to be very jealous of the Honour of God, who will submit himself to be made a Bishop by a Form of Words derogatory, upon his own Principles, to God's Honour.

Suppose

Suppose your Lordship was to have been consecrated to the Office of a Bishop by these Words; *Take thou Power to sustain all Things in Being given thee by my Hands.* I suppose your Lordship would think it entirely unlawful to submit to the Form of such an Ordination. But, my Lord, *Receive thou the Holy Ghost*, &c. is as impious a Form, according to your Lordship's Doctrine, and equally injurious to the eternal Power and Godhead, as the other. For if the Grace of God can only be had from *his own Hands*, would it not be as innocent in the Bishop to say, *Receive thou Power to sustain all Things in Being*, as to say, *Receive the Holy Ghost, by the Imposition of my Hands?* And would not a Compliance with either Form be equally unlawful? According to your Doctrine, in each of them God's Prerogative is equally invaded, and therefore the Guilt must be the same.

It may also well be wonder'd, how your Lordship can accept of a Character, which is, or ought to be, chiefly distinguish'd by the Exercise of that Power which you disclaim, as in the Offices of *Confirmation* and *Ordination*. For, my Lord, where can be the Sincerity of saying, *Receive the Holy Ghost by the Imposition of our Hands*, when you declare it affronting to God, to expect it from any Hands but his own? Suppose your Lordship had been preaching to the Laity against owning any Authority in the Virgin *Mary*, and yet should acquiesce in the Conditions of being made a Bishop in her Name, and by recognizing her Power; could such a Submission be consistent with Sincerity? Here you forbid the Laity to expect God's Grace from any Hands but his; yet not only accept of an Office, upon Supposition of the contrary Doctrine; but oblige your self according to the Sense of the Church wherein you are ordain'd a Bishop, to act frequently in direct Opposition to your own Principles;

So

So that, I think, it is undeniably plain, that you have at once, my Lord, by these Doctrines condemn'd the Scriptures, the Apostles, their martyr'd Successors, the Church of *England*, and your own Conduct; and have hereby given us some Reason (tho' I wish there were no Occasion to mention it) to suspect, whether you, who allow of no other Church, but what is founded in Sincerity, are your self really a Member of any Church.

I shall now proceed to say something upon the Consecration of the Lord's Supper, which is as much expos'd as a *Trifle*, by your Lordship's Doctrine, as the other Institutions. St. *Paul* says, *The Cup of Blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion of the Blood of Christ?* My Lord, is not this Cup still to be bless'd? Must there not therefore be such a Thing as an *human Benediction*? And are human Benedictions to be all despis'd, tho' by them the Bread and Wine become Means of Grace, and are made the spiritual Nourishment of our Souls? Can any one bless this Cup? If not, then there is a Difference between human Benedictions: Some are authorized by God, and their Blessing is effectual; whilst others only are vain and presumptuous. If the Prayer over the Elements, and the Consecration, be only a *Trifle* and a *Dream*, and it be offensive to God to expect they are converted into Means of Grace by an *human Benediction*; why then did St. *Paul* pretend to bless them? Why did he make it the Privilege of the Church? Or, why do we keep up the same Solemnity? But if it be to be bless'd only by God's Ministers, then how can your Lordship answer it to God, for ridiculing and abusing human Benedictions, and telling the World that a particular Order of the Clergy are not of any Necessity, nor can be of any Advantage to them? For if the Sacrament can only be bless'd by God's Ministers, then such Ministers are as necessary as the Sacraments themselves.

St.

St. *Paul* says, the Cup must be bless'd: If you say, any one may bless it, then, tho' you contemn the Benedictions of the Clergy, you allow of them by every body else: If every Body cannot bless it, then you must confess, that the Benedictions of some Persons are effectual, where others are not.

My Lord, the great Sin against the Holy Ghost was the Denial of his Operation in the Ministry of our Saviour. And how near does your Lordship come to it, in denying the Operation of that same Spirit, in the Ministers whom Christ hath sent? They are employed in the same Work that he was. He left his Authority with them, and promis'd that the Holy Spirit should remain with them to the End of the World; that whatsoever they should bind on Earth, should be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever they should loose on Earth, should be loosed in Heaven; that whosoever despises them, despises him, and him that sent him. And yet your Lordship tells us, we need not to trouble our Heads about any particular Sort of Clergy; that all is to be transacted betwixt God and our selves; that human Benedictions are insignificant Trifles.

But pray what Proof has your Lordship for all this? Have you any Scripture for it? Has God any where declar'd that no Men on Earth have any Authority to bless in his Name? Has he any where said, that it is a wicked, presumptuous Thing, for any one to pretend to it? Has he any where told us, that it is inconsistent with his Honour to bestow his Graces by *human Hands*? Has he any where told us that he has no Ministers, no Ambassadors on Earth; but that all his Gifts and Graces are to be receiv'd immediately from his own Hands? Have you any Antiquity, Fathers, or Councils, on your Side? No; the whole Tenor of Scripture, the whole Current of Tradition is against you: Your novel Doctrine has only this to recommend it to the Libertines of the
Age,

Age, who universally give into it, that it never was the Opinion of any Church, or Churchman. It is your Lordship's proper Assertion, *That we offend God in expecting his Graces from any Hands but his own.*

Now it's strange, that God should be offended with his own Methods, or that your Lordship should find us out a Way of pleasing him, more suitable to his Nature and Attributes, than what he has taught us in the Scriptures. I call them his own Methods; for what else is the whole *Jewish* Dispensation, but a Method of God's Providence, where his Blessings and Judgments were dispens'd by *human Hands*? What is the Christian Religion but a Method of Salvation, where the chief Means of Grace are offer'd and dispens'd by human Hands? Let me here recommend to your Lordship, the excellent Words of a very learned and judicious Prelate on this Occasion.

“ This will have no Weight with any reasonable
 “ Man, against the Censures of the Church, or any
 “ other Ordinance of the Gospel, that they make
 “ the Intervention of other Men necessary to our
 “ Salvation; since it has always been God's ordinary
 “ Method, to dispense his Blessings and Judgments
 “ by the Hands of Men.”*

Your Lordship exclaims against your Adversaries as such romantick strange sort of Men, for talking of Benedictions and Absolutions, and of the Necessity of receiving God's Ordinances from proper Hands: Yet, my Lord, here is an excellent Bishop, against whose *Learning, Judgment, and Protestantism* there can be no Objection; who says, if a Person have but the *Use of his Reason*, he will have nothing to object to any Ordinances of the Gospel, which make the Intervention of other Men necessary towards the Conveyance of them, since that has always been God's ordinary Method. The Bishop does not say, it is necessary a Man should be a *great Divine*

* *Dr. Potter's Church Government*, p. 336.

Divine to acknowledge it; so he be but a *reasonable Man*, he will allow it. Yet your Lordship is so far from being this *reasonable Man*, that you think your Adversaries void both of Reason and common Sense, for teaching it. You expressly exclude *all* Persons from having any Thing to do with our Salvation, and say, it wholly depends upon God and our selves.

You tell us, that *authoritative Benediction is another of the Terms of Art used by your Protestant Adversaries; in which they claim a Right, in one regular Succession, of blessing the People**. An ingenious Author, my Lord, (in the Opinion of many, if not of most of your Friends) calls the *Consecration* of the Elements *Conjunction*†: Your Lordship calls the *Sacerdotal Benediction* a *Term of Art*; too plain an Intimation, tho' in more remote and somewhat softer Terms, that in the Sense of a *certain Father* of the Church, her Clergy are little better than so many Jugglers.

Your Lordship says, *If they only meant hereby to declare upon what Terms God will give his Blessings to Christians, or to express their own hearty Wishes for them, this might be understood*. So it might, my Lord, very easily; and I suppose every Body understands that they may do this, whether they be Clergy or Laity, Men or Women: For I presume any one may declare what he takes to be the Terms of the Gospel, and wish that others may faithfully observe them. But I humbly presume, my Lord, that the good Bishop abovemention'd meant something more than this, when he spake of *Ordinances which make the Intervention of other Men necessary to our Salvation, and of God's dispensing his Blessings in virtue of them through their Hands*.

There is a superstitious Custom (in your Lordship's Account it must be so) yet remaining in most Places, of sending for a Clergyman to minister to sick Persons in imminent Danger of Death: Even

those

* Page 91. † *Rights of the Christian Church*.

those who have abus'd the Clergy all their Lives long are glad to beg their Assistance when they apprehend themselves upon the Confines of another World. There is no Reason, my Lord, to dislike this *Practice*, but as it supposes a Difference between the *Sacerdotal Prayers* and *Benedictions*, and those of a Nurse.

We read, my Lord, that God would not heal *Abimelech*, tho' he knew the Integrity of his Heart, till *Abraham* had prayed for him: *He is a Prophet*, said God, *he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live*, (Gen. xx. 7.)

Pray, my Lord, was not God just, and good, and true, in the Days of *Abraham*, as he is now? Yet you see, *Abimelech's Integrity* was not available it self. He was to be pardon'd by the Prayer of *Abraham*, and his Prayer was effectual; and so represented, because it was the Prayer of a *Prophet*.

Suppose, my Lord, that *Abimelech* had said with your Lordship, *That it is affronting to God, that we should expect his Graces from any Hands but his own; that all is to be transacted between God and our selves*; and so had rejected the Prayer of *Abraham*, as a mere Essay of *Prophet-Craft*; he had then acted with as much Prudence and Piety as your Lordship's Laity would do, if you could persuade them to despise *Benedictions* and *Absolutions*, to regard no particular sort of Clergy; but entirely depend upon God and themselves, without any other Assistance whatever.

We read also, that *Joshua* was full of the Spirit of Wisdom, for *Moses* had laid his Hands upon him, (Deut. xxxiv. 9.) Was it not as absurd, my Lord, in the Days of *Joshua*, for human Hands to bless, as it is now? Did there not then lie the same Objection against *Moses*, that there does now against the Christian Clergy? Had *Moses* any more natural Power to give the Spirit of Wisdom, &c. by his Hands, than the Clergy have to confer Grace by theirs?

They

They are both equally weak and insufficient for these Purposes, of themselves, and equally powerful when it pleases God to make them so.

Again, when *Eliphaz* and his Friends had displeased God, they were not to be reconciled to God by their own Repentance, or transact that Matter only between God and themselves; but they were referr'd to apply to *Job*. *My Servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept*, (*Job* xlii. 8.) Might not *Eliphaz* here have said, shall I so far affront God, as to think I can't be bless'd without the Prayers of *Job*? Shall I be so weak or senseless, as to imagine, my own Supplications and Repentance will not save me; or that I need apply to any one but God alone, to qualify me for the Reception of his Grace?

Again, *The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, speak unto Aaron and his sons, saying, on this wise shall ye bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless and keep thee, &c. and I will bless them*, (*Numb.* vi. 22.)

Again, *The Priests of the sons of Levi shall come near; for them hath the Lord thy God chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the Lord*, (*Deut.* xxi. 5.)

Now, my Lord, this is what we mean by the authoritative Administrations of the Christian Clergy; whether they be by way of Benediction, or of any other kind. We take them to be Persons whom God has chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in his Name. We imagine that our Saviour was a greater *Priest and Mediator* than *Aaron*, or any of God's former Ministers. We are assur'd that Christ sent his Apostles, as his Father had sent him, and that therefore they were his true Successors: And since they did commission others to succeed them in their Office, by the Imposition of Hands, as *Moses* commission'd *Joshua* to succeed him; the Clergy who have succeeded the Apostles have as divine a
Call

Call and Commission to their Work, as those who were call'd by our Saviour ; and are as truly his Successors, as the Apostles themselves were.

From the Places of Scripture above-mention'd it is evident, and indeed from the whole Tenor of Sacred Writ, that it may consist with the Goodness and Justice of God to depute Men to act in his Name, and be ministerial towards the Salvation of others ; and to lay a Necessity upon his Creatures of qualifying themselves for his Favour, and receiving his Graces by the Hands and Intervention of mere Men.

But, my Lord, if there be now any Set of Men upon Earth that are more peculiarly God's Ministers than others, and through whose Administrations, Prayers, and Benedictions, God will accept of returning Sinners, and receive them to Grace ; you have done all you can to prejudice People against them : You have taught the Laity that all is to be transacted between God and themselves, and that they need not value any particular sort of Clergy in the World.

I leave it to the Great Judge and Searcher of Hearts, to judge from what Principles, or upon what Motives your Lordship has been induc'd to teach these Things ; but must declare, that, for my own Part, if I had the greatest Hatred to Christianity, I should think it could not be more express'd than by teaching what your Lordship has publickly taught. If I could rejoice in the Misery and Ruin of Sinners, I should think it sufficient Matter of Triumph to drive them from the Ministers of God, and to put them upon inventing new Schemes of saving themselves, instead of submitting to the ordinary Methods of Salvation appointed by God.

It will not follow from any Thing I have said, that the Laity have lost their Christian Liberty, or that no Body can be sav'd but whom the Clergy

B

please

please to save; that they have the arbitrary Disposal of Happiness to Mankind. Was *Abimelech's* Happiness in the Disposition of *Abraham*, because he was to be receiv'd by Means of *Abraham's* Intercession? Or could *Job* damn *Eliphaz*, because he was to mediate for him, and procure his Reconciliation to God?

Neither, my Lord, do the *Christian Clergy* pretend to this despotick Empire over their Flocks: They don't assume to themselves a Power to damn the Innocent, or to save the Guilty; but they assert a sober and just Right to reconcile Men to God, and to act in his Name, in restoring them to his Favour. They receiv'd their Commission from those whom Christ sent with full Authority to send others, and with a Promise that he would be with them to the End of the World. From this they conclude, that they have his Authority, and that in consequence of it their Administrations are necessary, and effectual to the Salvation of Mankind; and that none can despise them, but who despise him that sent them; and are as surely out of the Covenant of Grace, when they leave such his Pastors, as when they openly despise, or omit to receive his Sacraments.

And what is there in this Doctrine, my Lord, to terrify the *Consciences* of the *Laity*? What is there here to bring the profane Scandal of *Priestcraft* upon the *Clergy*? Could it be any Ground of *Abimelech's* hating *Abraham*, because that *Abraham* was to reconcile him to God? Could *Eliphaz* justly have any Prejudice against *Job*, because God would hear *Job's* Intercession for him? Why then, my Lord, must the Christian Priesthood be so horrid and hateful an Institution, because the Design of it is to restore Men to the Grace and Favour of God? Why must we be abus'd and insulted for being sent upon the Errand of Salvation, and made Ministers of eternal Happiness to our Brethren? There is a Woe due to

us if we preach not the Gospel, or neglect those ministerial Offices that Christ has entrusted to us. We are to watch for their Souls, as those who are to give an Account. Why then must we be treated as arrogant Priests, or *popishly* affected, for pretending to have any Thing to do in the Discharge of our *Ministry*, with the Salvation of Men? Why must we be reproach'd with *blasphemous Claims*, and *absurd senseless Powers*, for assuming to bless in God's Name, or thinking our Administrations more effectual than the Office of a common *Layman*?

But farther, To what Purpose does your Lordship except against these Powers in the *Clergy*, from their *common Frailties* and *Infirmities* with the rest of Mankind? Were not *Abraham*, and *Job*, and the *Jewish* Priests, Men of like Passions with us? Did not our Saviour command the *Jews* to apply to their Priests, notwithstanding their personal Faults, because they sat in *Moses's* Chair? Did not the Apostles assure their Followers that they were Men of like Passions with them? But did they therefore disclaim their Mission, or Apostolical Authority? Did they teach, that their natural Infirmities made them less the Ministers of God, or less necessary to the Salvation of Men? Their personal Defects did not make them depart from the Claim of those Powers they were invested with, or desert their Ministry, but, indeed; gave St. *Paul* Occasion to say, *We have this Treasure in earthen Vessels*, (*i. e.* this Authority committed to mere Men) *that the excellency of it may be of God, and not of Men*. The Apostle happens to differ very much from your Lordship: He says, such weak Instruments were made use of that the Glory might redound to God. Your Lordship says, to suppose such Instruments to be of any Benefit to us, is to lessen the Sovereignty of God, and, in Consequence, his Glory.

Your Lordship imagines you have sufficiently destroy'd the *sacerdotal Powers*, by shewing, that the Clergy are only Men, and subject to the common Fraillties of Mankind. My Lord, we own the Charge, and don't claim any *sacerdotal Powers* from our personal Abilities, or to acquire any Glory to our selves. But, weak as we are, we are God's Ministers, and if we are either afraid or asham'd of our Duty, we must perish in the Guilt. But is a Prophet therefore proud, because he insists upon the Authority of his Mission? Can't a Mortal be God's Messenger, and employ'd in his Affairs, but he must be insolent and assuming, for having the Resolution to own it? If we are to be reprov'd for pretending to be God's Ministers, because we are but Men, the Reproach will fall upon Providence; since it has pleased God chiefly to transact his Affairs with Mankind by the Ministry of their Brethren.

Your Lordship has not one Word from Scripture against these sacerdotal Powers; no Proof that Christ has not sent Men to be effectual Administrators of his Graces: You only assert, that there can be no such Ministers, because they are mere Men.

Now, my Lord, I must beg Leave to say, that if the natural Weakness of Men makes them incapable of being the Instruments of conveying Grace to their Brethren; if the Clergy can't be of any Use or Necessity to their Flocks, for this Reason; then it undeniably follows, that there can be no *positive Institutions* in the Christian Religion, that can procure any spiritual Advantages to the Members of it; then the Sacraments can be no longer any Means of Grace. For, I hope, no one thinks that Bread and Wine have any natural Force or Efficacy to convey Grace to the Soul. The Water in Baptism has the common Qualities of Water, and is destitute of any intrinsic Power to cleanse the Soul, or purify from Sin. But your Lordship will not say, because
it

it has only the common Nature of Water, that therefore it cannot be a Means of Grace. Why then may not the Clergy, though they have the common Nature of Men, be constituted by God, to convey his Graces, and to be ministerial to the Salvation of their Brethren? Can God consecrate inanimate Things to spiritual Purposes, and make them the Means of eternal Happiness? And is Man the only Creature that he can't make subservient to his Designs? The only *Being*, who is too weak for an Omnipotent God to render effectual towards attaining the Ends of his Grace?

Is it just and reasonable, to reject and despise the *Ministry* and *Benedictions* of Men, because they are Men like ourselves? And is it not as reasonable, to despise the Sprinkling of Water, a Creature below us, a senseless and inanimate Creature?

Your Lordship therefore, must either find us some other Reason for rejecting the Necessity of *human Administrations*, than because they are *human*; or else give up the Sacraments, and *all* positive Institutions along with them.

Surely, your Lordship must have a mighty Opinion of *Naaman* the Syrian, who, when the Prophet bid him go wash in *Jordan* seven times, to the end he might be clean from his Leprosy, very *wisely* remonstrated, *Are not Abana and Pharpar, Rivers of Damascus, better than all the Waters of Israel?*

This, my Lord, discover'd *Naaman's* great Liberty of Mind; and 'tis much, this has not been produc'd before, as an Argument of his being a *Free-Thinker*. He took the Water of *Jordan* to be *only* Water; as your Lordship justly observes a Clergyman to be *only* a Man: And if you had been with him, you could have inform'd him, that the washing *seven Times* was a mere *Nicety* and *Trifle* of the Prophet; and that since it is God alone who can work *miraculous Cures*, we ought not to think, that

they depend upon any external Means, or any stated Number of repeating them.

This, my Lord, is the true Scope and Spirit of your Argument: If the *Syrian* was right in despising the Water of *Jordan*, because it was only *Water*; your Lordship may be right in despising any particular Order of Clergy, because they are but Men. Your Lordship is certainly as right, or as wrong, as he was.

And now, my Lord, let the common Sense of Mankind here judge, whether, if the Clergy are to be esteemed as having no Authority, because they are but Men; it does not plainly follow, that every thing else, every Institution that has not some *natural* Force and Power to produce the Effects designed by it, is not also to be rejected as equally trifling and ineffectual.

The Sum of the Matter is this: It appears from many express Facts, and indeed, from the whole Series of God's Providence, that it is not only consistent with his Attributes, but also agreeable to his ordinary Methods of dealing with Mankind, that he should substitute Men to act in his Name, and be *authoritatively* employ'd in conferring his Graces and Favours upon Mankind. It appears, that your Lordship's Argument against the authoritative Administrations of the Christian Clergy, does not only contradict those Facts, and condemn the ordinary Method of God's Dispensations; but likewise proves the Sacraments, and every positive Institution of Christianity, to be ineffectual, and as mere *Dreams* and *Trifles*, as the several *Offices and Orders* of the Clergy.

This, I hope, will be esteemed a sufficient Confutation of your Lordship's Doctrine, by all who have any true Regard or Zeal for the Christian Religion; and only expect to be saved by the Methods of Divine Grace proposed in the Gospel.

I shall

I shall now in a word or two set forth the Sacredness of the Ecclesiastical Character, as it is founded in the New Testament ; with a particular regard to the Power of conferring Grace, and the Efficacy of human Benedictions.

It appears therein that all sacerdotal Power is derived from the Holy Ghost. Our Saviour himself took not that Ministry upon him, till he had this Consecration : And during the time of his Ministry, he was under the Guidance and Direction of the Holy Ghost. Thro' the Holy Spirit he gave Commandment to the Apostles whom he had chosen. When he ordained them to the Work of the Ministry, it was with these Words, *Receive the Holy Ghost*. Those whom the Apostles ordained to the same Function, it was by the same Authority : They laid their Hands upon the Elders, exhorting them to take care of the Flock of Christ, over which the Holy Ghost had made them Overseers.

Hereby they plainly declar'd, that however this Office was to descend from Man to Man through *human Hands*, that it was the Holy Ghost which consecrated them to that Employment, and gave them Authority to execute it.

From this it is also manifest, that the Priesthood is a Grace of the Holy Ghost : That it is not a Function founded on the Natural or Civil Rights of Mankind, but is derived from the special Authority of the Holy Ghost ; and is as truly a positive Institution as the Sacraments. So that they who have no Authority to alter the Old Sacraments, and substitute New ones, have no Power to alter the Old Order of the Clergy, or introduce any other Order of them.

For why can we not change the Sacraments ? Is it not, because they are only Sacraments, and operate as they are instituted by the Holy Ghost ? Because they are useless ineffectual Rites without this Authority ?

city? And does not the same Reason hold as well for the Order of the Clergy? Does not the same Scripture tell us, they are equally instituted by the Holy Ghost, and oblige only by vertue of his Authority? How absurd is it therefore, to pretend to abolish, or depart from the settled Order of the Clergy, to make new Orders, or think any God's Ministers, unless we had his Authority, and could make new Sacraments, or a new Religion?

My Lord, how comes it, That we cannot alter the Scriptures? Is it not, because they are Divinely inspir'd, and dictated by the Holy Ghost? And since it is expresse Scripture, That the *Priesthood* is instituted and authorized by the same Holy Spirit, Why is not the Holy Ghost as much to be regarded in one Institution, as in another? Why may we not as well make a Gospel, and say, it was writ by the Holy Ghost, as make a new Order of Clergy, and call them his? Or esteem them as having any relation to him?

From this it likewise appears, That there is an absolute Necessity of a strict Succession of authorized Ordainers from the Apostolical Times, in order to constitute a *Christian Priest*. For since a Commission from the Holy Ghost is necessary for the exercise of this Office; no one now can receive it, but from those who have deriv'd their Authority in a true Succession, from the Apostles. We could not, my Lord, call our present Bibles *the Word of God*, unless we knew the Copies from which they are taken were taken from other true ones, till we come to the Originals themselves. No more could we call any true Ministers, or authorized by the Holy Ghost, who have not receiv'd their Commission by an uninterrupted Succession of lawful Ordainers.

What an excellent Divine would he be, who should tell the World, it was not necessary that the several Copies and Manuscripts through which the Scriptures

Scriptures have been transmitted thro' different Ages and Languages, should be all true ones, and none of them forg'd? That *this was a thing subject to so great Uncertainty, that God could not hang our Salvation on such Niceties?* Suppose, for Proof of this, he should appeal to the Scriptures; and ask, where any mention is made of ascertaining the Truth of all the Copies? Would not this be a Way of Arguing very Theological? The Application is very easy.

Your Lordship has not one Word to prove the uninterrupted Succession of the Clergy a *Trifle* or *Dream*; but that it is subject to so great Uncertainty, and is never mentioned in the Scriptures. As to the Uncertainty of it, it is equally as uncertain, as whether the Scriptures be *Genuine*. There is just the same sufficient Historical Evidence for the Certainty of one, as the other. As to its not being mentioned in the Scripture, the Doctrine upon which it is founded, plainly made it unnecessary to mention it. Is it needful for the Scriptures to tell us, that if we take our Bible from any false Copy, that it is not the Word of God? Why then need they tell us, that if we are ordained by usurping false Pretenders to Ordination, not deriving their Authority to that end from the Apostles, that we are no Priests? Does not the thing itself speak as plain in one Case as in the other? The Scriptures are only of use to us, as they are the Word of God: We cannot have this Word of God, which was written so many Years ago, unless we receive it from authentick Copies and Manuscripts.

The Clergy have their Commission from the Holy Ghost: The Power of conferring this Commission of the Holy Ghost, was left with the Apostles: Therefore the present Clergy cannot have the same Commission, or Call, but from an Order of Men, who have successively convey'd this Power from the Apostles to the present time. So that, my Lord,
I shall

I shall beg leave to lay it down, as a plain, undeniable, Christian Truth, that the Order of the Clergy is an Order of as necessary Obligation, as the Sacraments; and as unalterable as the Holy Scriptures; the same Holy Ghost being as truly the Author and Founder of the Priesthood, as the Institutor of the Sacraments, or the Inspirer of those Divine Oracles. And when your Lordship shall offer any fresh Arguments to prove that no particular sort of Clergy is necessary; that the Benedictions and Administrations of the present Clergy of our most excellent Church, are trifling Niceties; if I cannot shew, that the same Arguments will conclude against the Authority of the Sacraments and the Scriptures, I faithfully promise your Lordship to become a Convert to your Doctrine.

What your Lordship charges upon your Adversaries, as an absurd Doctrine, in pretending the Necessity of one regular, successive, and particular Order of the Clergy, is a true Christian Doctrine; and as certain from Scripture, as that we are to keep to the Institution of particular Sacraments; or not to alter those particular Scriptures, which now compose the Canon of the old and new Testament.

By authoritative Benediction, we do not mean any natural or intrinsic Authority of our own: But a Commission from God, to be effectual Administrators of his Ordinances, and to bless in his Name. Thus, a Person who is sent from God, to foretell things, of which he had before no Knowledge or Notion; or to denounce Judgments, which he has no natural Power to execute; may be truly said to be an *authoritative Prophet*; because he has the Authority of God for what he does. Thus, when the Bishop is said to confer Grace in Confirmation; this is properly an *authoritative Benediction*; because he is then as truly doing what God has commission'd him

him to do, as when a Prophet declares upon what Errand he is sent.

'Tis in this Sense, my Lord, that the People are said to be *authoritatively* bless'd by the regular Clergy; because they are *God's Clergy*, and act by his Commission; because by their Hands the People receive the Graces and Benefits of God's Ordinances; which they have no more Reason to expect from other Ministers of their own Election, or if the Word may be used in an abusive Sense, of their own *Consecration*, than to receive Grace from Sacraments of their own Appointment. The Scriptures teach us, That the Holy Ghost has instituted an Order of Clergy: We say, a Priesthood, so authorized, can no more be changed by us, than we can change the Scriptures, or make new Sacraments; because they are all founded on the same Authority, without any Power of a Dispensation delegated to us in one Case more than another. If therefore we have a Mind to continue in the Covenant of Christ, and receive the Grace and Benefit of his Ordinances, we must receive them through such Hands as he has authorized for that purpose, to the end we may be qualified to partake the Blessings of them. For as a *true* Priest cannot benefit us by administering a *false* Sacrament; so a *true* Sacrament is nothing, when it is administer'd by a *false uncommission'd Minister*. Besides this Benediction which attends the Ordinances of God, when they are thus perform'd by authoriz'd Hands, there is a Benediction of Prayer, which we may justly think very effectual, when pronounced or dispensed by the same Hands.

Thus when the Bishop or Priest intercedes for the Congregation, or pronounces the Apostolical Benediction upon them, we do not consider this barely as an Act of Charity and Humanity, of one Christian praying for another; but as the Work of a Person who is commissioned by God to *bless in his Name,*

Name, and be effectually ministerial in the Conveyance of his Graces ; or as the Prayer of one who is left with us in Christ's stead, to carry on his great Design of saving us ; and whose Benedictions are ever ratified in Heaven, but when we render ourselves in one Respect or other incapable of them.

Now, my Lord, they are these *sacerdotal Prayers*, these authoriz'd Sacraments, these commission'd Pastors, whom the Holy Ghost has made Overseers of the Flock of Christ, that your Lordship encourages the Laity to despise. You bid them *contemn the vain Words of Validity or Invalidity of God's Ordinances ; to heed no particular sort of Clergy, or the pretended Necessity of their Administrations.*

Your Lordship sets up in this Controversy for an Advocate for the Laity, against the *arrogant Pretences*, and *false Claims* of the Clergy. My Lord, we are no more contending for our selves in this Doctrine, than when we insist upon any Article in the Creed. Neither is it any more our particular Cause, when we assert our Mission, than when we assert the Necessity of the Sacraments.

Who is to receive the Benefit of that Commission which we assert, but they ? Who is to suffer, if we pretend a false one, but our selves ? Sad Injury, indeed, offer'd to the Laity ! that we should affect to be thought Ministers of God for their Sakes ! If we really are so, they are to receive the Benefit ; if not, we are to bear the Punishment.

But your Lordship comes too late in this glorious Undertaking, to receive the Reputation of it ; the Work has been already, in the Opinion of most People, better done to your Lordship's Hands. The famous Author of *The Rights of the Christian Church*, has carried this *Christian Liberty* to as great Heights as your Lordship. And tho' you have not one Notion, I can recollect, that has given Offence to the World, but what seems taken from that pernicious

nicious Book ; yet your Lordship is not so just as ever once to cite or mention the Author ; who, if your Lordship's Doctrine be true, deserves to have a Statue erected to his Honour, and receive every Mark of Esteem which is due to the greatest Reformer of Religion.

Did not mine own Eyes assure me that he has cast no Contempt upon the Church, no Reproach upon the Evangelical Institutions, or the Sacred Function, but what has been seconded by your Lordship, I would never have plac'd your Lordship in the same View with so scandalous a Disclaimer against the Ordinances of Christ. Whether I am right, or not, in this Charge, I freely leave to the Judgment of those to determine, who are acquainted with both your Works. Yet this Author, my Lord, has been treated by the greatest and best Part of the Nation, as a Free-thinking Infidel. But for what, my Lord ? Not that he has declar'd against the Scriptures ; not that he has rejected Revelation ; (we are not, blessed be God, still so far corrupted with the Principles of Infidelity) but because he has reproach'd every particular Church, as such, and denied all Obligation to Communion ; because he has expos'd Benedictions, Absolutions, and Excommunications ; denied the Divine Right of the Clergy, and ridicul'd the pretended Sacredness and Necessity of their Administrations, as mere Niceties and Trifles, tho' commonly in more distant, I was going to say more decent Ways : In a word, because he made all Churches, all Priests, all Sacraments, however administr'd, equally valid, and denied any particular Method necessary to Salvation. Yet after all this profane Declamation, he allows, my Lord, that *Religious Offices may be appropriated to particular Men, call'd Clergy, for Order sake only ; and not on the Account of any peculiar Spiritual Advantages, Powers, or*
Privi-

*Privileges, which those who are set apart for them have from Heaven.**

Agreeable to this, your Lordship owns, that you are not against the *Order*, or *Decency*, or *Subordination* belonging to *Christian Societies*.†

But, pray, my Lord, do you mean any more by this, than the abovemention'd Author? Is it for any Thing, but the Sake of a little external *Order* or *Conveniency*? Is there any Christian Law that obliges to observe this kind of Order? Is there any real essential Difference between Persons rank'd into this Order? Is it a Sin for any Body, especially the Civil Magistrate, to leave this Order, and make what other Orders he prefers to it? This your Lordship cannot resolve in the Affirmative; for then you must allow, that some Communions are safer than others, and that some Clergy have more Authority than others.

Will your Lordship say, that no *particular* Order can be necessary; yet some Order necessary, which may be different in different Communions? This cannot hold good upon your Lordship's Principles; for since Christ has left no Law about any Order, no Members of any particular Communion need submit to that Order; since it is confess'd by your Lordship, That in Religion no Laws, but those of Christ, are of any Obligation. So that tho' you don't disclaim all external Order and Decency your self, yet you have taught other People to do it if they please, and as much as they please.

Suppose, my Lord, some Layman, upon a Pretence of your Lordship's Absence, or any other, should go into the Diocese of *Bangor*, and there pretend to ordain Clergymen; could your Lordship quote one Text of Scripture against him? Could you alledge any Law of Christ, or his Apostles, that he had broken? Could you prove him guilty of any Sin?

* Page 131.

† Answer to Dr. Snape, p. 48.

Sin? No, my Lord, you would not do that; because this would be acknowledging such a Thing as a *Sinful Ordination*; and if there be Sinful Ordinations, then there must be some *Law* concerning Ordinations: For *Sin is the Transgression of the Law*: And if there be a Law concerning Ordinations, then we must keep to the Clergy *lawfully* ordain'd; and must confess, after all your Lordship has said, or can say, that still some Communions are safer than others.

If you should reprove such a one, as an *Englishman*, for acting in Opposition to the *English Laws of Decency and Order*; he would answer, That he has nothing to do with such *Trifles*; That Christ was sole Lawgiver in his Kingdom; That he was content to have his Kingdom as *orderly* and *decent* as Christ had left it; and since he had instituted no Laws in that Matter, it was presuming for others to take upon them to add any Thing by way of *Order* or *Decency*, by Laws of their own: That as he had as much Authority from Christ to ordain Clergy, as your Lordship, he would not depart from his Christian Liberty.

If he should remonstrate to your Lordship in these, or Words to the like Effect, he would only reduce your Lordship's own Doctrine to Practice. This, my Lord, is part of that Confusion the learned Dr. *Snape* has charg'd you with being the Author of, in the Church of God: And all Persons, my Lord, whom you have taught not to regard any particular Sort of Clergy, must know (if they have the common Sense to which you appeal) that then no Clergy are at all necessary; and that it's as lawful for any Man to be his own Priest, as to solicit his own Cause. For to say that no particular Sort of Clergy are necessary, and yet that in general the Clergy are necessary, is the same as to say, that Truth is necessary to be believ'd; yet the Belief of no particular Truth is necessary.

The

The next Thing to be consider'd, my Lord, is your Doctrine concerning Absolutions. You begin thus: *The same you will find a sufficient Reply to their presumptuous Claim to an authoritative Absolution. An infallible Absolution cannot belong to fallible Men. But no Absolution can be authoritative, which is not infallible. Therefore no authoritative Absolution can belong to any Man living.**

I must observe here, your Lordship does not reject this *Absolution*, because the Claim of it is not founded in Scripture; but by an Argument drawn from the Nature of the Thing: Because you imagine such Absolution requires Infallibility for the Execution of it; therefore it cannot belong to Men. Should this be true, it would prove, that if our Saviour had really so intended, he could not have given this Power to his Ministers. But, my Lord, who can see any Repugnancy in the Reason of the Thing it self? Is it not as easy to conceive, that our Lord should confer his Grace of Pardon by the Hands of his Ministers, as by Means of the Sacraments? And may not such Absolution be justly call'd *authoritative*, the Power of which is granted, and executed by his Authority?

Is it impossible for Men to have this Authority from God, because they may mistake in the Exercise of it? This Argument proves too much, and makes as short Work with every Institution of Christianity, as with this Power of Absolution.

For if it is impossible that Men should have Authority from God to absolve in his Name, because they are not infallible; this makes them equally incapable of being entrusted with any other Means of Grace; and consequently supposes the whole Priest's Office to imply a direct Impossibility in the very Notion of it.

* *Preservative*, p. 92.

Your Lordship's Argument is this: Christians have their Sins pardon'd upon certain Conditions; but fallible Men cannot certainly know these Conditions: Therefore fallible Men cannot have Authority to *absolve*.

From hence I take Occasion to argue thus: Persons are to be admitted to the Sacraments on certain Conditions; but fallible Men cannot tell whether they come qualified to receive them according to these Conditions: Therefore fallible Men cannot have Authority to administer the Sacraments.

2dly, This Argument subverts all Authority of the Christian Religion it self, and the Reason of every instituted Means of Grace. For if nothing can be authoritative, but what a Man is infallibly assured of, then the Christian Religion cannot be an authoritative Method of Salvation; since a Man, by being a Christian, does not become infallibly certain of his Salvation: Nor does Grace infallibly attend the Participation of the Sacraments. So that tho' your Lordship has form'd this Argument only against this absolving Power, yet it has as much Force against the Sacraments, and the Christian Religion it self. For if it be absurd to suppose that the Priest should absolve any one, because he cannot be certain that he deserves Absolution; does it not imply the same Absurdity, to suppose that he should have the Power of administering the Sacraments, when he cannot be *infallibly certain* that those who receive them are duly qualified? If a Possibility of Error destroys the Power in one Case, it as certainly destroys it in the other. Again, if Absolution cannot be authoritative, unless it be infallible; then it is plain that the Christian Religion is not an authoritative Means of Salvation; because all Christians are not infallibly sav'd: Nor can the Sacraments be authoritative Means of Grace, because all who partake of them do not infallibly obtain Grace.

Your Lordship proceeds with your Laity by way of Expostulation: *If they amuse you with that Power which Christ left with his Apostles, Whose soever Sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever Sins ye retain, they are retained unto them.**

But why *amuse*, my Lord? Are the Texts of Holy Scripture to be treated as only Matter of *Amusement*? Or does your Lordship know of any Age in the Church when the very same Doctrine which we now teach, has not been taught from the same Texts?

Do you know any Successors of the Apostles that thought the Power there specified did not belong to them? But, however, your Lordship has taught your Laity to believe what we argue from this Text, all Amusement; and told them, *They may securely answer, that it is impossible for them to depend upon this Right as any thing certain, till they can prove to you that every thing spoken to the Apostles, belongs to Ministers in all Ages.†* The Security of this Answer, my Lord, is founded upon this false Presumption, *viz.* That the Clergy can claim no Right to the Exercise of any Part of their Office, *as Successors of the Apostles*, till they can prove that every Thing that was spoken to the Apostles, belongs to them.

This Proposition must be true, or else there is no Force or *Security* in the Objection you here bring for the Instruction of the Laity. If it is well founded, then the Clergy can't possibly prove they have any more Right to the Exercise of any Part of their Office than the Laity. Do they pretend to ordain, confirm, to admit or exclude Men from the Sacraments? By what Authority is all this done? Is it not because the Apostles, whose Successors they are, did the same Things? But then, say your Lordship's well-instructed Laity, this is nothing to the Purpose: Prove your selves Apostles; prove that every Thing
said

* Page 93.

† Page 94.

said to the Apostles belongs to you ; and then it will be allow'd, that you may exercise these Powers, because they exercised them: But as this is impossible to be done, so it is impossible for you to prove that you have any Powers or Authorities, because they had them.

And now, my Lord, if the Case be thus, what Apology shall we make for Christianity, as it has been practis'd in all Ages? How shall we excuse the Noble Army of Martyrs, Saints, and Confessors, who have boldly asserted the Right to so many Apostolical Powers? Could any Men in those Ages pretend, *that every thing that was spoken to the Apostles, belonged to themselves?* False, then, was their Claim, and presumptuous their Authority, who should pretend to any Apostolical Powers, because the Apostles had them ; when they could not prove, *that every thing that was spoken to the Apostles, belonged to them.*

Farther ; To prove that the above-mention'd Text does not confer the Power of Absolution in the Clergy, you reason thus: *Whatever contradicts the Natural Notions of God, and the Design and Tenor of the Gospel, cannot be the true Meaning of any Passage in the Gospel : But to make the Absolution of weak and fallible Men so necessary, or so valid, that God will not pardon without them ; or that all are pardon'd who have them pronounced over them, is, to contradict those Notions, as well as the plain Tenor of the Gospel.**

Be pleas'd, my Lord, to point out your Adversary ; name any one Church of *England* Man that ever taught this romantick Doctrine which you are confuting. Who ever taught such a Necessity of Absolutions, that God will pardon none without them? Who ever declar'd that all are pardon'd who have them pronounc'd over them? We teach the *Necessity and Validity* of Sacraments ; but do we ever declare that all are sav'd who receive them? Is there

no *Medium* between two Extremes? No such Thing, my Lord, as *Moderation*! Must every Thing be thus absolute and extravagant, or nothing at all?

In another Page we have more of this same Colouring: *But to claim a Right to stand in God's Stead, in such a Sense, that they can absolutely and certainly bless, or not bless, with their Voice alone: This is the highest Absurdity and Blasphemy, as it supposeth God to place a Set of Men above himself; and to put out of his own Hands the Disposal of his Blessings and Curses.**

If your Lordship had employ'd all this Oratory against worshipping the Sun or Moon, it had just affected your Adversaries as much as this. For who ever taught that any Set of Men could *absolutely* bless, or with-hold Blessing, independent of God? Who ever taught, that the Christian Religion, or Sacraments, or Absolution, sav'd People on course, or without proper Dispositions? Who ever claim'd such an absolving Power, as to set himself above God, and to take from him the Disposal of his own Blessings and Curses? What has such extravagant Descriptions, such romantick Characters of Absolution to do with that Power the Clergy justly claim? Cannot there be a Necessity in some Cases of receiving Absolution from their Hands, except they set themselves above God? Is God robb'd of the Disposal of his Blessings, when, in Obedience to his own Commands, and in virtue of his own Authority, they admit some as Members of the Church, and exclude others from the Communion of it? Do they pretend to be Channels of Grace, or the Means of Pardon, by any Rights or Powers naturally inherent in them? Do they not in all these Things consider themselves as Instruments of God, that are made ministerial to the Edification of the Church, purely by his Will, and only so far as they act in Conformity to it? Now if it has pleas'd God to confer the Holy Ghost

in

in Ordination, Confirmation, &c. only by them, and to annex the Grace of Pardon to the Imposition of their Hands, on returning Sinners; is it any *Blasphemy* for them to claim and exert their Power? Is the Prerogative of God injur'd, because his own Institutions are obey'd? Cannot he dispense his Graces by what Persons, and on what Terms he pleases? Is he depriv'd of the Disposal of his Blessings, because they are bestow'd on Persons according to his Order, and in obedience to his Authority? If I should affirm, that Bishops have the sole Power to ordain and confirm, would this be robbing God of his Disposal of those Graces that attend such Actions? Is it not rather allowing and submitting to God's own Disposal, when we keep close to those Methods of it which himself has prescrib'd?

Pray, my Lord, consider the Nature of Sacraments. Are not they necessary to Salvation? But is God therefore excluded from any Power of his own? Has he for that Reason, set Bread and Wine in the Eucharist, or Water in Baptism, above Himself? Has he put the Salvation of Men out of his own Power, because it depends on his own Institutions? Is the Salvation of Christians less his own Act and Deed, or less the Effect of his own Mercy, because these Sacraments in great measure contribute to effect it? Why then, my Lord, must that Imposition of Hands that is attended with his Grace of Pardon, and which has no Pretence to such Grace, but in Obedience to his Order, and in virtue of his Promise, be thus destructive of his Prerogative? Where is there any Diminution of his Honour or Authority, if such Actions of the Clergy are made necessary to the Salvation of Souls in some Circumstances, as their washing in Water, or their receiving Bread and Wine? Cannot God institute Means of Grace, but those Means must needs be above Himself? They owe all their Power and Efficacy to his Institution;

and can operate no farther than the Ends for which he instituted them. How then is he dethron'd for being thus obey'd?

My Lord, you take no notice of Scripture; but in a new Way of your own, contend against this Power, from the Nature of the Thing: Yet I must beg leave to say, this Power stands upon as sure a Bottom, and is as consistent with the Goodness and Majesty of God, as the Sacraments. If the annexing Grace to Sacraments, and making them necessary Means of Salvation, be a reasonable Institution of God; so is his annexing Pardon to the Imposition of Hands by the Clergy on returning Sinners. The Grace or Blessing receiv'd in either Case, is of his own giving, and in a Method of his own prescribing. And how this should be any Injury to God's Honour, or Affront to his Majesty, cannot easily be accounted for.

The Clergy justly claim a Power of reconciling Men to God, from express Texts of Scripture; and of delivering his Pardons to penitent Sinners. Your Lordship disowns this Claim, as making fallible Men the absolute Dispensers of God's Blessings, and putting it in their Power to damn and save as they please. But, my Lord, nothing of this Extravagance is included in it. They are only entrusted with a *conditional* Power; which they are to exercise according to the Rules God has given; and it only obtains its Effect when it is so exercised. Every instituted Means of Grace is *conditional*; and is only then effectual, when it is attended with such Circumstances, as are requir'd by God. If the Clergy, through Weakness, Passion or Prejudice, exclude Persons from the Church of God, they injure only themselves. But, my Lord, are these Powers nothing, because they may be exercis'd in vain? Have the Clergy no right at all to them, because they are not *absolutely infallible* in the Exercise of them?

Can

Can you prove, my Lord, that they are not necessary, because they have not always the same Effect? May not that be necessary to Salvation, which is only effectual on *certain Conditions*? Is not the Christian Religion necessary to Salvation, though all Christians are not sav'd? Are not the Sacraments necessary Means of Grace, tho' the Means of Grace obtain'd thereby is only Conditional? Is every one necessarily improv'd in Grace, who receives the Sacrament? Or is it less necessary, because the salutary Effects of it are not more universal? Why then must the Imposition of Hands be less necessary, because the Grace of it is Conditional, and only obtain'd in due and proper Circumstances? Is Absolution nothing, because if withheld wrongfully, it injures not the Person who is denied it; and if given without due Dispositions in the Penitent, it avails nothing? Is not this equally true of the Sacraments, if they are deny'd wrongfully, or administred to unprepar'd Receivers? But do they therefore cease to be standing and necessary Means of Grace?

The Argument therefore against this Power, drawn from the Ignorance or Passions of the Clergy, whereby they may mistake or pervert the Application of it, can be of no Force; since it is as Conditional as any other Christian Institution. The Salvation of no Man can be endanger'd by the Ignorance or Passions of any Clergymen in the Use of this Power: If they err in the Exercise of it, the Consequences of their Error only affect themselves. The Administration of the Sacraments is certainly entrusted to them: But will any one say, that the Sacraments are not necessary to Salvation; because they may, through Ignorance or Passion, make an ill Use of this Trust?

There is nothing in this Doctrine to gratify the Pride of Clergymen, or encourage them to lord it over the Flock of Christ. If you could suppose an

Atheist or a Deist in Orders; he might be arrogant, and domineer in the Exercise of his Powers: But who, that has the least Sense of Religion, can think it matter of Triumph, that he can deny the Sacraments, or refuse his Benediction to any of his Flock? Can he injure or offend the least of these; and will not God take Account? Or, if they fall through his Offence, will not their Blood be required at his Hands?

Neither is there any thing in it that can enslave the Laity to the Clergy; or make their Salvation depend upon their arbitrary Will. Does any one think his Salvation in danger, because the Sacraments (the necessary means of it) are only to be administer'd by the Clergy? Why then must the Salvation of *Penitents* be endanger'd, or made dependent on the sole Pleasure of the Clergy; because they alone can reconcile them to the Favour of God? If Persons are unjustly denied the Sacraments, they may humbly hope, that God will not lay the Want of them to their Charge. And if they are unjustly kept out of the Church, and denied Admittance, they have no Reason to fear but God will notwithstanding accept them, provided they be in other respects proper Objects of his Favour.

But to proceed, your Lordship says, *The Apostles might possibly understand the Power of remitting and retaining Sins, to be that Power of laying their Hands upon the Sick.*

Is this *possible*, my Lord? Then it is *possible*, the Apostles might think, that in the Power here intended to be given them, *nothing at all* was intended to be given them. For the Power of healing the Sick, was already conferr'd upon them. Therefore if no more was intended to be given them in this Text, it cannot be interpreted, as having entitled them properly to any Power at all.

2. The Power mentioned here, was something that Jesus promised he would give them hereafter: Which plainly supposes, they had it not then: But they then had the Power of *Healing*; therefore something else must be intended here.

3 The Power of the *Keys* has always been look'd upon as the highest in the Apostolical Order. But if it related only to the Power of Healing, it could not be so: For the *Seventy*, who were inferior to the Apostles, had this Power.

4. The very Manner of Expression in this Place, proves, that the Power here intended to be given, could not relate to *Healing the Sick*, or to any thing of that Nature; but to some *spiritual Power*, whose Effects should not be *visible*; but be made good by virtue of God's Promise. Thus, *whomsoever ye shall heal on Earth, I will heal in Heaven*; borders too near upon an Absurdity. There is no occasion to promise to make *good* such Actions as are good already, and have antecedently produc'd their Effects. Persons who were restor'd to Health, to their Sight, or the Use of their Limbs, did not want to be assured, that the Apostles, by whom they were restored, had a Power to that End; the Exercise of which Power prov'd and confirm'd itself. There was no need therefore of a Divine Assurance, that a Person who was healed, was actually healed in virtue of it. But when we consider this Promise, as relating to a *Power* whose *Effects* are not *visible*, as the *Pardon of Sins*, the Terms whereby it is express'd, are most proper; And it is very reasonable to suppose God promising, that the spiritual Powers exercis'd by his Ministers on Earth, though they do not here produce their *visible Effects*, shall yet be made good and effectual by him in *Heaven*.

These Reasons, my Lord, I should think, are sufficient to convince any one, that the Apostles could

could not *possibly* understand these Words in the Sense of your Lordship.

Let us now consider the Commission given to *Peter*. Our Saviour said to him, *Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my Church, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it: And I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven.*

Now, my Lord, how should it enter into the Thoughts of *Peter*, that nothing was here intended, or promised by our Saviour, but a Power of Healing; which he not only had before, but also many other Disciples, who were not Apostles? *I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*; that is, according to your Lordship, *I will give thee Power to heal the Sick*. Can any thing be more contrary to the plain obvious Sense of the Words? Can any one be said to have the *Keys* of the Kingdom of Heaven, because he may be the Instrument of restoring People to Health? Are Persons Members of Christ's Kingdom, with any regard to Health? How then can he have any Power in that Kingdom; or be said to have the *Keys* of it, who is only empower'd to cure Distempers? Could any one be said to have the *Keys* of a temporal Kingdom, who had no temporal Power given him in that Kingdom? Must not he therefore who has the *Keys* of a spiritual Kingdom, have some spiritual Power in that Kingdom?

Christ has told us, that his Kingdom is not of this World. Your Lordship has told us, that it is so foreign to every thing of this World, that no *worldly Terrors* or Allurements, no Pains or Pleasures of the Body can have any thing to do with it. Yet here your Lordship teaches us, that he may have the *Keys* of this spiritual Kingdom, who has only a Power over Diseases. My Lord, are not Sickness and

and Health, Sight and Limbs, Things of this World? Have they not some relation to bodily Pleasures and Pains? How then can a Power about Things wholly confin'd to this World, be a Power in a Kingdom that is not of this World? The Force of the Argument lies here: Our Saviour has assured us, that his Kingdom is not of this World: Your Lordship takes it to be of so spiritual a Nature, that it ought not, nay, that it cannot be encourag'd or establish'd by any worldly Powers. *Our Saviour gives to his Apostles the Keys of this Kingdom:* Yet you have so far forgotten your own Doctrine, and the Spirituality of this Kingdom, that you tell us, he here gave them a temporal Power of Diseases; though he says, they were the *Keys of his Kingdom* which he gave them. Suppose any Successor of the Apostles should from this Text pretend to the Power of the Sword, to make People Members of this Kingdom: Must not the Answer be, that he mistakes the Power, by not considering, that they are only the *Keys of a spiritual*, not of a temporal Kingdom, which were here deliver'd to the Apostles.

I humbly presume, my Lord, that this would be as good an Answer to your Lordship's Doctrine, as to theirs who claim the Right of the Sword, till it can be shewn that *Health* and *Sickness*, *Sight* and *Limbs*, do not as truly relate to the Things of this World as the Power of the Sword.

If this Power of the Keys must be understood, only as a Power of inflicting or curing Diseases; then the Words, in the proper Construction of them, must run thus: *Tbou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my Church*, i. e. a peculiar Society of healthful People, *and the Gates of Hell shall never prevail against it*, i. e. they shall always be in a State of Health. *I will give unto thee the Keys of this Kingdom of Heaven*, i. e. thou shalt have the Power of inflicting and curing Distempers; *and whatsoever thou shalt*
bind

bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven, i. e. on whomsoever thou shalt inflict the Leprosy on Earth, he shall be a Leper in Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on Earth, shall be loos'd in Heaven, i. e. whomsoever thou shalt cure of that Disease on Earth, shall be perfectly cur'd of it in Heaven.

This, without putting any Force upon the Words, is your Lordship's own Interpretation; which exposes the Honour and Authority of Scriptures as much as the greatest Enemy to them can wish. If our Saviour cou'd mean by these Words, only a *Power of healing Distempers*; or if the Apostles understood them in that Sense, we may as well believe that when he said, *His Kingdom was not of this World*, that he meant, it was of this World; and that the Apostles so understood him too.

But, however, for the Benefit and Edification of the Laity, your Lordship has another Interpretation for them: You say, *if they (the Apostles) did apply this Power of remitting Sins to the certain Absolution of particular Persons, it is plain, they could do it upon no other Bottom but this; that God's Will and good Pleasure about such particular Persons was infallibly communicated to them.*

Pray, my Lord, how, or where is this so plain? Is it plain that they never baptiz'd Persons till God had *infallibly communicated his good Pleasure to them about such particular Persons*? Baptism is an Institution equally sacred with this other, and puts the Person baptiz'd in the same State of Grace *that Absolution* does the Penitent. Baptism is design'd for the Remission of Sin. It is an Ordinance to which Absolution is consequent; but I suppose Persons may be baptiz'd without such *infallible Communication* promised, as your Lordship contends for. If therefore it be not necessary for the Exercise of Absolution by Baptism, why must it be necessary for Absolution by the Imposition of Hands?

Can

Can Pastors without Infallibility baptize Heathens, and absolve, or be the Instruments of absolving them thereby from their Sins? Are they not as able to absolve Christian Penitents, or restore those who have apostatiz'd? If human Knowledge, and the common Rules of the Church, be sufficient to direct the Priest to whom he ought to administer the Sacraments; they are also sufficient for the Exercise of this other Part of the sacerdotal Office.

But your Lordship proceeds thus: *Not that they themselves absolved any.*

No, my Lord, no more than Water in Baptism of *it self* purifies the Soul from Sin. This baptismal Water is, notwithstanding, necessary for the Remission of our Sins.

Again, you say, *Not that God was oblig'd to bind and loose the Guilt of Men according to their Declarations, considered as their own Decisions, and their own Determinations.* No, my Lord; who ever thought so? God is not oblig'd to confer Grace by the *baptismal Water*, consider'd only as *Water*; but he is, consider'd as *his own Institution* for that End and Purpose. So if these Declarations are consider'd only as *the Declarations of Men*, God is not obliged by them: But when they are consider'd as the Declarations of *Men* whom he has especially authoriz'd to make *such* Declarations in his Name, then they are as effectual with God, as any other of his Institutions whatever.

I proceed now to a Paragraph that bears as hard upon our Saviour as some others have done upon his Apostles and their Successors; where your Lordship designs to prove, that tho' Christ claim'd a Power of remitting Sins himself, or in his own Person, yet that he had really no such Power.

You go upon these Words: *If we look back upon our Saviour himself, we shall find, that when he declares that the Son of Man had Power upon Earth to forgive Sins, even he himself either meant by it the Power*
of

of a miraculous releasing Man from his Affliction; or if it related to another more spiritual Sense of the Words, the Power of declaring, that the Man's Sins were forgiven by God*.

The Words of our Saviour, which we are to look back upon, are these: *Whether it is easier to say, thy Sins are forgiven thee; or to say, arise, take up thy Bed and walk? But that ye may know, the Son of Man hath Power on Earth to forgive Sins,* (Mark ii. 9, 10.) As if he had said, "Is not the same Divine Authority and Power requir'd? Is it not a Work as peculiar to God, to perform miraculous Cures, as to forgive Sins? The Reason therefore why I now chuse to declare my Authority, rather by saying, *Thy Sins are forgiven thee*, than by saying, *Arise and walk*, was purely to teach you this Truth, that the Power of the Son of Man is not confin'd to Bodily Cures; but that he has Power on Earth to forgive Sins."

This, my Lord, is the first obvious Sense of the Words; and therefore I take it to be the true Sense. But your Lordship can look back upon them, till you find that Christ has not this Power, tho' he claims it expressly; but that he only intends a Power of doing *something or other*, which no more imports a Power of forgiving Sins, than of remitting any temporal Debt or Penalty.

If our blessed Saviour had intended to teach the World that he was invested with this Power, I would gladly know how he must have express'd himself, to have satisfied your Lordship that he really had it? He must have told you, that he had not this Power and then possibly your Lordship would have taught us, that he had this Power. For no one can discover any Reason why you should deny it him, but because he has in express Words claim'd and asserted it. I hope your Lordship has not so low an Opinion of

* *Preservative*, p. 94.

of our Saviour's Person, as to think it unreasonable in the Nature of the Thing, that he should have this Power. Where does it contradict any Principle of Reason, to say, that a *King* should be able to pardon his Subjects? Since there is no Absurdity then in the Thing it self, and it is so expressly asserted in Scripture; it is just Matter of Surprise, that your Lordship should carry your Reader from a plain consistent Sense of the Words, to *either this or that Something or other*, the Origin whereof is only to be sought for in your Lordship's own Invention; rather than not exclude Christ from a Power which he declar'd he had, and declar'd he had it for this very Reason, *that we might know that he had it*. Our Saviour has told us, that the Way to Heaven is *narrow*. Your Lordship might as reasonably prove from hence, that he meant, it was *broad*, as that he did not mean he could forgive Sins, when he said *that ye may know, that the Son of Man hath Power on Earth to forgive Sins*.

Your Lordship has rejected all *Church Authority*, and despis'd the pretended *Powers* of the Clergy, for this Reason; because Christ is the *sole King, sole Lawgiver, and Judge in his Kingdom*. But, it seems, your Lordship, notwithstanding, thinks it now Time to depose him: And this *sole King in his own Kingdom*, must not be allow'd to be capable of pardoning his own Subjects.

This Doctrine, my Lord, is deliver'd, I suppose, as your other Doctrines, out of a hearty Concern and *Christian Zeal* for the Privileges of the Laity; and to shew that your Lordship is not only able to limit as you please the Authority of *temporal Kings*; but also to make Christ himself *sole King*, and yet *no King*, in his Spiritual Kingdom. For, my Lord, the Kingdom of Christ is a Society founded in order to the Reconciliation of Sinners to God. If therefore Christ could not pardon Sins, to what End
could

could he either erect, or how could he support his Kingdom, which is only in the great and last Design of it, to consist of absolv'd Sinners? He that cannot forgive Sins in a Kingdom that is erected for the Remission of Sins, can no more be *sole King* in it, than he that has no *temporal Power*, can be *sole King* in a *temporal Kingdom*. Therefore your Lordship has been thus mighty serviceable to the Christian Laity, as to teach them that Christ is not only *sole King*, but *no King* in his Kingdom.

This is not the first Contradiction your Lordship has unhappily fallen into, in your Attempts upon *kingly Authority*. Nor is it the last which I shall presume to observe to the *common Sense* of your Laity.

Again, in this Account of our blessed Saviour, your Lordship has made no Difference between him and his Apostles, as to this *absolving Authority*. For you say, the *great Commission* given to them implied either a Power of releasing Men from their bodily Afflictions; or of declaring such to be pardon'd, whom God had assur'd them that he had pardon'd: And this *all* that you here allow to Christ himself.

Your Lordship's calling him so often *King*, and *sole King*, &c. in his Kingdom, and yet making him a *mere Creature* in it, is too like the Insult, and design'd Sarcasm of the *Jews*, who, when they had nail'd him to the Cross, writ over his Head, *This is the King of the Jews*.

But to proceed: Your Lordship proves, That our Saviour had not the Power of *forgiving Sins*; because *His Way of Expression was, Thy Sins are forgiven thee. This was plainly to acknowledge, and keep up that true Notion, that God alone forgiveth Sins.*

Let us therefore put this Argument in Form. Christ has affirm'd, that he had Power to forgive Sins: But this Way was, to say, *Thy Sins are forgiven thee*: Therefore Christ had not Power to forgive Sins. Q. E. D.

It is much your Lordship did not recommend this to your Laity as another *invincible Demonstration*. For by the Help of it, my Lord, they may prove that our Saviour could no more *heal Diseases*, than *forgive Sins*. As thus; Christ indeed pretends to a Power of healing Diseases; but his usual Way of speaking to the diseas'd Person was, *thy Faith hath made thee whole*; therefore he had not the Power of *healing Diseases*. The Argument has the same Force against one Power, as against the other. If he did not *forgive Sins*, because he said, *Thy Sins are forgiven thee*; no more did he heal Diseases, because he said, *Thy Faith hath made thee whole*.

I have a Claim of several Debts upon a Man; I forgive him them all, in these Words, *Thy Debts are remitted thee*. A philosophical Wit stands by, and pretends to prove, that I had not the Power of remitting these Debts; because I said, *Thy Debts are remitted thee*. What can come up to, or equal such *profound Philosophy*, but the *Divinity* of one who teaches, our Saviour could not forgive Sins, because he said, *Thy Sins are forgiven thee*?

But your Lordship says, the Reason why our Saviour thus expressed himself, *Thy Sins are forgiven thee*, "was plainly to keep up that true Notion, that "God alone forgiveth Sins." Therefore, my Lord, according to this Doctrine, our Saviour was oblig'd not to claim any Power that was *peculiar* or *appropriated* to God alone. For if this be an Argument, why he should not *forgive Sins*, it is also an Argument that he ought not to claim any other Power, any more than this; which is proper to God, and only belongs to him. But, my Lord, if he did express himself thus, that he might not lay Claim to any Thing that was peculiar to God, how came he in so many other Respects to lay Claim to such Things as are as truly peculiar to God, as the Forgiveness of Sins? How came he in so many Instances

to make himself equal to God? How came he to say, *Ye believe in God, believe also in me? And that Men should worship the Son, even as the Father?* That he was the Son of God; that he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Are not evangelical Faith, Worship, and Trust, Duties that are solely due to God? Does he not as much invade the Sovereignty of God, who lays Claim to these Duties, as he that pretends to *forgive Sins*? Did not Christ also give his Disciples *Power and Authority* over Devils and unclean Spirits, and Power to heal all manner of Diseases?

Now if Christ did not assume a Power to *forgive Sins*, because God alone could forgive Sins, it is also as unaccountable that he should exercise other *Authorities* and Powers which are as strictly peculiar to God, as that of forgiving Sins. As if a Person should disown that Christ is omniscient, because Omniscience is an *Attribute* of God *alone*; and yet confess his Omnipotence, which is an Attribute equally *divine*.

But farther, my Lord: Did our Saviour thus designedly express himself, lest he should be thought to assume any Power which was divine, then it is certain (according to this Opinion) that if he had assumed any such Power, or pretended to do what was peculiar to God, he had been the Occasion of misleading Men into Error. For if this be a plain Reason why he expressed himself so as to disown this Power, it is plain that if he had own'd it, he had been condemn'd by this Argument, as teaching false Doctrine.

Now if this would have been interpretatively false Doctrine in Christ, to take upon himself any Thing that was peculiar to God, the Apostles were guilty of propagating this false Doctrine. For there is scarce any known Attribute or Power of God, but they ascribe it to our Saviour. They declare him
eternal,

eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, &c. Is it not a true Notion, that God alone can create, and is Governor of the Universe? Yet the Apostles expressly assure us of Christ, that *all Things were created by him*, and that *God hath put all Things in Subjection under his Feet*. 'Tis very surprizing that your Lordship should exclude Christ from this Power of *forgiving* Sins, tho' he has expressly said he could forgive Sins, because such a Power belongs only to God: When it appears through the whole Scripture that there is scarce any divine Power which our Saviour himself has not claim'd, nor any Attribute of God but what his Apostles have ascrib'd to him. They have made him the *Creator*, the *Preserver*, the *Governor* of the Universe, the Author of eternal Salvation to all that obey him; and yet your Lordship tells us that he did not pretend to *forgive Sins*, because that was a Power peculiar to God.

Here is then (to speak in your Lordship's elegant Style) an *immoveable Resting-place* for your Laity to set their Feet upon; here is an *Argument that will last them for ever*: They must believe that our Saviour did not forgive Sins, *because* this was a Power that belong'd to God, tho' the Scriptures assure us that every other divine Power belong'd to Christ. That is, they must believe, that tho' our Saviour claim'd all divine Powers, yet not this divine Power, *because* it is a divine Power. And, my Lord, if they have the common Sense to believe this, they may also believe, that tho' our Saviour took human Nature upon him, yet that he had not a human Soul, because it is proper to Man. They may believe, that any Person who has all kingly Power, cannot remit or reprieve a Malefactor, *because* it is an Act of kingly Power to do it; or that a Bishop cannot suspend any Offender of his Diocese, because it is an Act of episcopal Power to do it. All these Reasons are as strong and demonstrative as that Christ

who claim'd all divine Powers, could not forgive Sins, *because* it was a *divine Power*.

Lastly, In this Argument your Lordship has plainly declar'd against the Divinity of Christ, and rank'd him in the Order of Creatures. Your Lordship says, Christ did not forgive Sins, *because* it is God *alone who can forgive Sins*; as plain an Argument as can be offer'd, that in your Lordship's Opinion Christ is not God: For if you believ'd him, in a true and proper Sense, God, how could you exclude him from the Power of forgiving Sins, *because* God alone can forgive Sins? It is inconsistent with Sense and Reason to deny this Power to Christ *because* it is a divine Power, but only *because* you believe him not to be a divine Person. If Christ was God, then he might forgive Sins, tho' God alone can forgive Sins: But you say, Christ cannot forgive Sins, *because* God *alone* can forgive Sins; therefore it is plain, that, according to your Lordship's Doctrine, Christ is not truly, or in a proper Sense, God.

Here, my Lord, I desire again to appeal to the *common Sense* of your Laity; let them judge betwixt the Scriptures and your Lordship. The Scriptures plainly and frequently ascribe all divine Attributes to Christ: They make him the Creator and Governor of the World; God over all, blessed for ever. Yet your Lordship makes him a Creature, and denies him *such* a Power, *because* it belongs only to God.

You your self, my Lord, have allow'd him to be absolute Ruler over the Consciences of Men; to be an arbitrary Dispenser of the Means of Salvation to Mankind; than which Powers, none can be more divine: And yet you hold, that he cannot forgive Sins, *because* Pardon of Sin can only be the Effect of a divine Power.

Is it not equally a divine Power, (even according to your Lordship) to rule over the Consciences of Men,

Men, to give Laws of Salvation, and to act in these Affairs with an uncontrollable Power, as to *forgive Sins*?

My Lord, let their common Sense here discover the Absurdity (for I must call it so) of your *new Scheme* of Government in Christ's Kingdom. Christ is *absolute* Lord of it, (according to your self) and can make or unmake Laws relating to it; can dispense or withhold Grace as he pleases in this spiritual Kingdom, all which Powers are purely divine; yet you say he cannot forgive Sins, tho' every express Power which you have allow'd him over the Consciences of Men, be as truly a *divine Power* as that of *forgiving Sins*. Has not Christ a proper and personal Power to give Grace to his Subjects? Is he not Lord over their Consciences? And are not these Powers as truly appropriated to God? And has not your Lordship often taught them to be so, as that of *Forgiveness of Sins*? Is it not as much the Prerogative of God to have any natural intrinick Power, to confer Grace, or any spiritual Benefit to the Souls of Men, as to forgive Sins? Has not your Lordship despis'd all the Administrations of the Clergy, because God's Graces can only come from himself, and are only to be receiv'd from his own Hands? The Conclusion therefore is this, either Christ has a personal intrinick Power to confer Grace in his Kingdom, or he has not; if you say he has not, then you are chargeable with the Collusion of making him a King in a spiritual Kingdom, where you allow him no spiritual Power: If you say he has, then you fall into this Contradiction, that you allow him to have divine Powers, tho' he cannot have divine Powers; that is, you allow him to *give Grace*, tho' it is a divine Power, and not to *forgive Sins*, because it is a divine Power. My Lord, I wish your Laity (if there be any to whom you can render it intelligible) much Joy of such profound Divinity. Or

if there are others who are more taken with your Lordship's Sincerity, I desire them not to pass by this following remarkable Instance of it: Your Lordship has here as plainly declar'd, as Words can consequentially declare any Thing, that you do not believe Christ to be God, yet profess your self Bishop of a Church, whose Liturgy in so many repeated Testimonies declares the contrary Doctrine, and which obliges you to express your Assent and Consent to such Doctrine. My Lord, I here call upon your *Sincerity*, either declare Christ to be perfect God, and then shew why he could not *forgive Sins*, or deny him to be perfect God, and then shew how you can sincerely declare your *Assent* and *Consent* to the Doctrines of the Church of *England*.

This, my Lord, has an Appearance of Prevarication, which you cannot, I hope, charge upon any of your Adversaries, who if they cannot think that to be sincere is the only Thing necessary to recommend Men to the Favour of God, yet may have as much, or possibly more Sincerity, than those who do think so.

Before I take Leave of your Lordship, I must take Notice of a *Resting-place*, a *strong Retreat*, a *lasting Foundation*, i. e. a *Demonstration in the strictest Sense* of the Words, that all *Church-Communion* is unnecessary.

Your Lordship sets it out in these Words:

I am not now going to accuse you of a Heresy against Charity, but of a Heresy against the Possibility and Nature of Things. As thus, Mr. Nelson (for Instance) thinks himself oblig'd in Conscience to communicate with some of our Church. Upon this you declare he hath no Title to God's Mercy; and you and all the World allow, that if he communicates with you whilst his Conscience tells him it is a Sin, he is self-condemn'd, and out of God's Favour. That Notion (viz. the Necessity of Church-

Church-Communion) *therefore, which implies this great invincible Absurdity, cannot be true.*

Pray, my Lord, what is this wond'rous Curiosity of a *Demonstration*, but the common Case of an *erroneous Conscience*? Did the strictest Contenders for Church-Communion ever teach, *that any Terms* are to be complied with against Conscience? But it's a strange Conclusion to infer from thence, that there is no Obligation to Communion, or that all Things are to be held indifferent, because they are not to be complied with against one's Conscience.

The Truths of the Christian Religion have the same Nature and Obligation, whatever our Opinions are of them, and those that are necessary to be believ'd, continue so, whether we can persuade our selves to believe them or not. I suppose your Lordship will not say, that the Articles of Faith and necessary Institutions of the Christian Religion, are no otherways necessary, than because we believe them to be so, that our Persuasion is the only Cause of the Necessity; but if their Necessity be not owing merely to our Belief of them, then it is certain that our Disbelief of them cannot make them less necessary. If the Ordinances of Christ, and the Articles of Faith are necessary, because Christ has made them so, that Necessity must continue the same, whether we believe and observe them or not.

So that, my Lord, we may still maintain the Necessity of Church-Communion, and the strict Observance of Christ's Ordinances, notwithstanding that People have different Persuasions in these Matters, presuming *that our Opinions* can no more alter the Nature or Necessity of Christ's Institutions, than we can believe *Error* into *Truth*, *Good* into *Evil*, or *Light* into *Darkness*. I shall think my self no *Heretick* against the *Nature of Things*, tho' I tell a *conscientious Socinian*, that the Divinity of Christ is necessary to be believed, or a *conscientious Jew*, that it is

necessary to be a Christian in order to be saved. But if your Lordship's Demonstration was accepted, we should be oblig'd to give up the Necessity of every Doctrine and Institution, to every Disbeliever that pretended Conscience. We must not tell any Party of People that they are in any Danger for being out of Communion with us, if they do but follow their own Persuasion.

Your Lordship's *invincible Demonstration* proceeds thus:

We must not insist upon the Necessity of joining with any particular Church, because then conscientious Persons will be in Danger either Way; for if there be a Necessity of it, then there is a Danger if they do not join with it, and if they comply against their Consciences, the Danger is the same.

What an inextricable Difficulty is here! How shall Divinity or Logick be able to relieve us!

Be pleas'd, my Lord, to accept of this Solution, in lieu of your Demonstration.

I will suppose the Case of a *conscientious Jew*; I tell him that Christianity is the only covenanted Method of Salvation, and that he can have no Title to the Favour of God, till he professes the Faith of Christ. What, replies he, would you direct me to do? If I embrace Christianity against my Conscience, I am out of God's Favour; and if I follow my Conscience, and continue a *Jew*, I am also out of his Favour. The Answer is this, my Lord; The *Jew* is to obey his Conscience, and to be left to the *uncovenanted, unpromised* Terms of God's Mercy, whilst the conscientious Christian is entitled to the *express and promised Favours* of God.

There is still the same absolute Necessity of believing in Christ, Christianity is still the only Method of Salvation; tho' the sincere *Jew* cannot so persuade himself; and we ought to declare it to all *Jews* and Unbelievers whatsoever, that they can only be

be sav'd by embracing Christianity. That a false Religion does not become a true one, nor a true one false, in Consequence of their Opinions; but that if they are so unhappy as to refuse the Covenant of Grace, they must be left to such *Mercy* as is without any Covenant. And now, my Lord, what is become of this mighty Demonstration? Does it prove that Christianity is not necessary, because the conscientious *Jew* may think it is not so? It may as well prove that the Moon is no larger than a Man's Head because an honest ignorant Countryman may think it no larger.

Is there any Person of *common Sense*, who would think it a Demonstration that he is not obliged to go to Church, because a *conscientious* Dissenter will not? Could he think it less necessary to be a Christian, because a *sincere Jew* cannot embrace Christianity? Could he take it to be an indifferent Matter whether he believed the Divinity of Christ, because a *conscientious Socinian* cannot? Yet this is your Lordship's *invincible Demonstration*, that we ought not to insist upon the Necessity of Church-Communion, because a *conscientious Disbeliever* cannot comply with it.

A small Degree of *common Sense* would teach a Man that true Religion, and the Terms of Salvation, must have the same obligatory Force, whether we reason rightly about them or not; and that they who believe and practise according to them, are in express Covenant with God, which entitles them to his Favour; whilst those who are sincerely erroneous, have nothing but the Sincerity of their Errors to plead, and are left to such Mercy of God, as is without any Promise. Here, my Lord, is nothing frightful or absurd in this Doctrine, they who are in the Church which Christ has founded, are upon Terms which entitle them to God's Favour; they who are out of it, fall to his Mercy.

But

But your Lordship is not content with the Terms of the Gospel, or a Doctrine that only saves a particular Sort of People; this is a narrow View, not wide enough for your Notions of *Liberty*. Particular Religions, and particular Covenants, are *demonstrated* to be absurd, *because* particular Persons may disbelieve, or not submit to them.

Your Lordship must have Doctrines that will save all People alike, in every way that their Persuasion leads them to take: But, my Lord, there needs be no greater Demonstration against your Lordship's Doctrine, than that it equally favours every Way of Worship; for an Argument which equally proves every Thing, has been generally thought to prove nothing; which happens to be the Case of your Lordship's *important Demonstration*.

Your Lordship indeed only instances in a particular Person, Mr. *Nelson*; but your *Demonstration* is as serviceable to any other Person who has left any other Church whatever. The *conscientious Quaker*, *Muggletonian*, *Independent*, or *Socinian*, &c. have the same Right to obey Conscience, and blame any Church that assumes a Power of censuring them, as Mr. *Nelson* had; and if they are censur'd by any Church, that Church is as guilty of the same *Heresy against the Nature of Things*, as that Church which censur'd Mr. *Nelson*, or any Church that should pretend to censure any other Person whatever.

I am not at all surpriz'd that your Lordship should teach this Doctrine, but 'tis something strange that such an Argument should be obtruded upon the World as an unheard-of *Demonstration*, and that in an *Appeal to common Sense*. Suppose some Body or other in Defence of your Lordship, should take upon him to demonstrate to the World that there is no such Thing as Colour, because there are some People that can't see it; or Sounds, because there are some who don't hear them; He would have found out

out the only *Demonstration* in the World that could equal your Lordship's, and would have as much Reason to call those *Hereticks against the Nature of Things*, who should disbelieve him, and insist upon the Reality of Sounds, as your Lordship has to call your Adversaries so.

For is there no Necessity of Church-Communion, because there are some who don't conceive it? Then there are no Sounds, because there are some who don't hear them; for it is certainly as easy to believe away the *Truth* and *Reality*, as the *Necessity* of Things.

Some People have only taught us the *Innocency of Error*, and been content with setting forth its harmless Qualities; but your Lordship has been a more hearty Advocate, and given it a *Power* over every Truth and Institution of Christianity. If we have but an *erroneous Conscience*, the whole Christian Dispensation is cancell'd; all the Truths and Doctrines in the Bible are *demonstrated* to be unnecessary, if we do not believe them.

How unhappily have the several Parties of Christians been disputing for many Ages, who, if they could but have found out this *intelligible Demonstration*, (from the Case of an erroneous Conscience) would have seen the Absurdity of pretending to necessary Doctrines, and insisting upon *Church-Communion*; but it must be acknowledged your Lordship's *new-invented Engine* for the Destruction of *Churches*; and it may be expected the *good Christians of no Church* will return your Lordship their Thanks for it.

Your Lordship has thought it a mighty Objection to some Doctrines in the *Church of England*, that the Papists might make some Advantage of them: But yet your own Doctrine defends *all* Communions alike, and serves the *Jew* and *Socinian*, &c. as much as any other sort of People. Tho' this sufficiently appears, from what has been already said, yet that
it

it may be still more obvious to the *common Sense* of every one, I shall reduce these Doctrines to Practice, and suppose, for once, that your Lordship intends to convert a *Jew*, a *Quaker*, or *Socinian*.

Now in order to make a Convert of any of them, these Preliminary PROPOSITIONS are to be first laid down according to your Lordship's Doctrine.

Some *Propositions* for the Improvement of true Religion.

Proposition I. That we are neither more or less in the Favour of God, for living in any particular Method or Way of Worship, but purely as we are sincere, *Preserv.* p. 90.

Prop. II. That no Church ought to unchurch another, or declare it out of God's Favour, *Preserv.* p. 85.

Prop. III. That nothing loses us the Favour of God, but a wicked Insincerity, *Ibid.*

Prop. IV. That a conscientious Person can be in no Danger for being out of any particular Church, *Preserv.* p. 90.

Prop. V. That there is no such Thing as any real Perfection or Excellency in any Religion, that can justify our adhering to it, but that all is founded in our personal Persuasion; which your Lordship thus proves: *When we left the Popish Doctrines, was it because they were actually corrupt? No; The Reason was, because we thought them so.* Therefore if we might leave the Church of Rome, not because her Doctrines were corrupt, but because we thought them so, then the same Reason will justify any one else, in leaving any Church, how true soever its Doctrines are; and consequently there is no such Thing as any real Perfection or Excellency in any Religion consider'd in it self, but is right or wrong according to our Persuasions about it, *Preserv.* p. 85.

Prop. VI. That Christ is sole King and Lawgiver in his Kingdom, that no Men have any Power of Legi-

Legislation in it; that if we would be good Members of it, we must shew our selves Subjects of Christ alone, without any Regard to Man's Judgment.

Prop. VII. That as Christ's Kingdom is not of this World, so when worldly Encouragements are annexed to it, these are so many Divisions against Christ and his own expresse Word, *Serm. p. 11.*

Prop. VIII. That to pretend to know the Hearts and Sincerity of Men, is Nonsense and Absurdity, *Serm. p. 93.*

Prop. IX. That God's Graces are only to be receiv'd immediately from himself, *Serm. p. 89.*

These, my Lord, are your Lordship's own Propositions, expressed in your own Terms, without any Exaggeration.

And now, my Lord, begin as soon as you please, either with a *Quaker*, *Socinian*, or *Jew*; use any Argument whatsoever to convert them, and you shall have a sufficient Answer from your own Propositions.

Will you tell the *Jew* that Christianity is necessary to Salvation? He will answer from *Prop. I.* *That we are neither more or less in the Favour of God, for living in any particular Method or Way of Worship, but purely as we are sincere.*

Will your Lordship tell him, that the Truth of Christianity is so well asserted, that there is no Excuse left for Unbelievers? He will answer from *Prop. V.* *That all Religion is founded in personal Persuasion; that as your Lordship does not believe that Christ is come, because he is actually come, but because you think he is come; so he does not disbelieve Christ because he is not actually come, but because he thinks he is not come.* So that here, my Lord, the *Jew* gives as good a Reason why he is not a Christian, as your Lordship does why you are not a Papist.

If your Lordship should turn the Discourse to a *Quaker*, and offer him any Reasons for embracing
the

the Doctrine of the *Church of England*, you can't possibly have any better Success; any one may see from your *Propositions*, that no Argument can be urg'd but what your Lordship has there fully answered. For since you allow nothing to the *Truth* of Doctrines, or the *Excellency* of any Communion as such, it is demonstrable that no Church or Communion can have any Advantage above another, which is absolutely necessary in order to persuade any sensible Man to exchange any Communion for another.

Will your Lordship tell a *Quaker* that there is any Danger in that particular Way that he is in?

He can answer from *Prop. I, III, and IV. That a conscientious Person can't be in any Danger for being out of any particular Church.*

Will your Lordship tell him that his Religion is condemned by the universal Church?

He can answer from *Prop. II. That no Church ought to unchurch another, or declare it out of God's Favour.*

Will you tell him that Christ has instituted Sacraments as *necessary Means* of Grace, which he neglects to observe?

He will answer you from *Prop. IX. That God's Graces are only to be received* immediately from himself. And to think that *Bread and Wine*, or the sprinkling of Water, is necessary to Salvation, is as absurd, as to think any Order of the Clergy is necessary to recommend us to God.

Will your Lordship tell him that he displeases God, by not holding several Articles of Faith, which Christ has required us to believe?

He can reply from *Prop. III. That nothing loses us the Favour of God* but a *wicked Insincerity*. And from *Prop. V. That as your Lordship believes such Things*, not because they are actually to be believ'd, but because you think so; so he disbelieves them, not because they are actually false, but because he thinks so.

Will

Will your Lordship tell him he is insincere?

He can reply from *Prop. VI.* *That to assume to know the Hearts and Sincerity of Men, is Nonsense and Blasphemy.*

Will your Lordship tell him that he ought to conform to a Church establish'd by the Laws of the Land?

He can answer from *Prop. VIII.* *That this very Establishment is an Argument against Conformity; For as Christ's Kingdom is not of this World, so when worldly Encouragements are annexed to it, they are so many Decisions against Christ, and his own express Words. And from Prop. VII. That seeing Christ is sole King and Lawgiver in his Kingdom, and no Men have any Power of Legislation in it, they who would be good Members of it, must shew themselves Subjects to Christ alone, without any Regard to Man's Judgment.*

I am inclin'd to think, my Lord, that it is now demonstrated to the common Sense of the Laity, that your Lordship cannot urge any Argument, either from the *Truth*, the *Advantage*, or *Necessity* of embracing the Doctrines of the Church of England, to either *Jew*, *Heretick*, or *Schismatick*, but you have help'd him to a full Answer to any such Argument, from your own Principles.

Are we, my Lord, to be treated as *popishly* affected for asserting some Truths, which the Papists join with us in asserting? Is it a Crime in us not to drop some necessary Doctrines, because the Papists have not dropt them? If *this* is to be *popishly* affected, we own the Charge, and are not for being such *true Protestants*, as to give up the *Apostles Creed*, or lay aside the Sacraments, because they are receiv'd by the Church of Rome. I cannot indeed charge your Lordship with being *well affected* to the Church of Rome or of England, to the *Jews*, the *Quakers*, or *Socinians*; but this I have demonstrated, and will undertake the Defence of it, that your Lordship's
Principles

Principles equally serve them all alike, and don't give the least Advantage to one Church above another, as has sufficiently appear'd from your *Principles*.

I will no more say your Lordship is in the Interest of the *Quakers*, or *Socinians*, or *Papists*, than I would charge you with being in the Interest of the Church of *England*; for as your Doctrines equally support them all, he ought to ask your Lordship's Pardon, who should declare you more a Friend to one than the other.

I intended, my Lord, to have considered another very obnoxious Article in your Lordship's Doctrines concerning the *Repugnancy of temporal Encouragements to the Nature of Christ's Kingdom*; but the Consistency and Reasonableness of guarding this spiritual Kingdom with human Laws, has been defended with so much Perspicuity and Strength of Argument, and your Lordship's Objections so fully confuted by the judicious and learned Dean of *Chichester*, that I presume this Part of the Controversy is finally determined.

I hope, my Lord, that I have delivered nothing here that needs any Excuse or Apology to the Laity, that they will not be persuaded, through any vain Pretence of Liberty, to make themselves Parties against the first Principles of Christianity; or imagine, that whilst we contend for the positive Institutions of the Gospel, the Necessity of Church-Communion, or the Excellency of our own, we are robbing them of their natural Rights, or interfering with their Privileges. Whilst we appear in the Defence of any part of Christianity, we are engag'd for them in the common Cause of Christians, and I am persuaded better Things of the Laity, than to believe that such Labours will render either our Persons or Possessions hateful to them. Your Lordship has indeed endeavoured to give an invidious Turn to
the

the Controversy, by calling upon the Laity to assert their Liberties, as if they were in Danger from the Principles of Christianity. — But, my Lord, what Liberty does any Layman lose, by our asserting, that *Church-Communion* is necessary? What Privilege is taken from them by our teaching the Danger of certain Ways and Methods of Religion? Is a Man made a Slave because he is caution'd against the Principles of the *Quakers*, against *Fanaticism*, *Popery*, or *Socinianism*? Is he in a State of Bondage because the Sacraments are necessary, and none but episcopal Clergy ought to administer them? Is his Freedom destroy'd because there is a particular Order of Men appointed by God to minister in holy Things, and be serviceable to him in recommending him to the Favour of God? Can any Persons, my Lord, think these Things Breaches upon their Liberty, except such as think the Commandments a Burden? Is there any more Hardship in saying thou shalt keep to an episcopal Church, than thou shalt be baptiz'd? Or in requiring People to receive particular Sacraments, than to believe particular Books of Scripture to be the Word of God? If some other Advocate for the Laity should, out of Zeal for their Rights, declare that they need not believe one half of the Articles in the Creed, if they would but assert their Liberty, he would be as true a Friend, and deserve the same Applause, as he who should assert the Necessity of Church-Communion is inconsistent with the natural Rights and Liberties of Mankind.

I am, my LORD,

Your Lordship's most

Humble Servant,

William Law.

E

POST-

P O S T S C R I P T.

I Hope your Lordship will not think it unnatural or impertinent, to offer here a Word or two in Answer to some Objections against my former Letter.

To begin with the Doctrine of the uninterrupted Succession of the Clergy.

I have, as I think, prov'd that there is a divine Commission requir'd to qualify any one to exercise the priestly Office, and that seeing this divine Commission can only be had from such particular Persons as God has appointed to give it, therefore it is necessary that there should be a continual Succession of such Persons, in order to keep up a commission'd Order of the Clergy. For if the Commission it self be to descend through Ages, and distinguish the Clergy from the Laity; it is certain the Persons who alone can give this Commission, must descend thro' the same Ages, and consequently an uninterrupted Succession is as necessary as that the Clergy have a divine Commission. Take away this Succession, and the Clergy may as well be ordain'd by one Person as another; a Number of Women may as well give them a divine Commission, as a Congregation of any Men; they may indeed appoint Persons to officiate in holy Orders, for the Sake of *Decency* and *Order*; but then there is no more in it, than an external *Decency* and *Order*; they are no more the Priests of God, than those that pretended to make them so. If we had lost the Scriptures, it would be very well to make as good Books as we could, and come as near them as possible; but then it would be not only Folly, but Presumption, to call them the Word of God. But I proceed to the Objections against the Doctrine of an uninterrupted Succession.

First, It is said, that there is no mention made of it in Scripture, as having any Relation to the Being of a Church.

Se-

Secondly, That it is subject to so great Uncertainty, that if it be necessary we can't now be sure we are in the Church.

Thirdly, That it is a popish Doctrine, and gives them great Advantage over us.

I begin with the *first* Objection, that there is no mention made of it in the Scriptures, which tho' I think I have sufficiently answer'd in this Letter, I shall here farther consider.

Pray, my Lord, is it not a true Doctrine, that *the Scriptures contain all Things necessary to Salvation*? But, my Lord, it is no where expressly said, that *the Scriptures contain all Things necessary to Salvation*. It is no where said, that no other Articles of Faith need be believed. Where does it appear in Scripture that the Scriptures were writ by any divine Command? Have any of the Gospels or Epistles this Authority to recommend them? Are they necessary to be believ'd, because there is any Law of Christ concerning the Necessity of believing them?

May I reject this uninterrupted Succession, because it is not mention'd in Scripture? And may I not as well reject all the Gospels? Produce your Authority, my Lord, mention your Texts of Scripture, where Christ has *hung the Salvation of Men* upon their believing that St. *Matthew* or St. *John* wrote such a Book seventeen hundred Years ago. These, my Lord, are *Niceties* and *Trifles* which are not to be found in Scripture, and consequently have nothing to do with the Salvation of Men.

Now if nothing be to be held as necessary, but what is expressly requir'd in so many Words in Scripture, then it can never be prov'd that the Scriptures themselves are a *standing Rule of Faith in all Ages*, since it is no where expressly asserted, nor is it any where said, that the Scriptures should be continued as a Rule of Faith in all Ages. Is it an Objection against the Necessity of a perpetual Succession of

the Clergy, that it is not mention'd in the Scripture? And is it not as good a one against the *Necessity* of making Scripture the *standing Rule of Faith in all Ages*, since it is never said that they were to be continu'd as a standing Rule in all Ages? If Things are only necessary for being said to be so in Scripture, then all that are not thus taught are equally unnecessary, and consequently it is no more necessary that the Scripture should be a fix'd Rule of Faith in all Ages, than that there should be Bishops to ordain in all Ages.

Again, Where shall we find it in Scripture, that the Sacraments are to be continued in every Age of the Church? Where is it said that they shall always be the ordinary Means of Grace necessary to be observ'd? Is there any Law of Christ, any Text of Scripture, that expressly asserts, that if we leave the Use of the Sacraments, we are out of Covenant with God? Is it any where directly said, that we must never lay them aside, or that they will be *perpetually* necessary? No, my Lord, this is a *Nicety* and *Trifle* not to be found in Scripture: *There is no Strefs laid there upon this Matter, but upon Things of a quite different Nature.*

I now presume, my Lord, that every one who has common Sense plainly sees, that if this Succession of the Clergy be to be despis'd, because it is not expressly requir'd in Scripture; it undeniably follows, that we may reject the Scriptures, as not being a *standing Rule of Faith in all Ages*; we may disuse the Sacraments, as not the *ordinary Means of Grace in all Ages*; since this is no more mentioned in the Scriptures, or *expressly* requir'd, than this uninterrupted Succession.

If it be a good Argument against the Necessity of episcopal Ordainers, that it is never said in Scripture that there shall *always* be such Ordainers; it is certainly as conclusive against the Use of the Sacraments

ments in every Age, that it is no where said in Scripture they shall be used in *all Ages*.

If no Government or Order of the Clergy be to be held as necessary, because no such Necessity is asserted in Scripture; it is certain this concludes as strongly against *Government*, and *the Order it self*, as against any *particular Order*. For it is no more said in Scripture that there shall be an Order of Clergy, than that there shall be any *particular Order*; therefore if this Silence proves against any *particular Order of Clergy*, it proves as much against *Order it self*.

Should therefore any of your Lordship's Friends have so much Church-Zeal as to contend for the Necessity of *some Order*, tho' of no particular Order; he must fall under your Lordship's Displeasure, and be prov'd as meer a *Dreamer* and *Trifler*, as those who assert the Necessity of episcopal Ordination. For if it be plain that there need be no *episcopal Clergy*, because it is not said there shall *always* be episcopal Clergy; it is undeniably plain that there need be no *Order of the Clergy*, since it is no where said, there shall be *an Order of Clergy*: Therefore whoever shall contend for an Order of Clergy, will be as much condemn'd by your Lordship's Doctrine, as he that declares for the episcopal Clergy.

The Truth of the Matter is this; if nothing is to be esteemed of any Moment, but counted as mere *Trifle* and *Nicety* among Christians, which is not expressly requir'd in the Scriptures; then it is a *Trifle* and *Nicety*, whether we believe the Scripture to be a *standing Rule of Faith* in all Ages, whether we use the Sacraments in *all Ages*, whether we have any Clergy at all, whether we observe the Lord's Day, whether we baptize our Children, or whether we go to publick Worship; for none of these Things are expressly required in so many Words in Scripture. But if your Lordship, with the rest of the Christian

World, will take these Things to be of Moment, and well prov'd, because they are founded in Scripture, tho' not in *express Terms*, or under *plain Commands*; if you will acknowledge these Matters to be well asserted, because they may be gather'd from Scripture, and are confirm'd by the universal Practice of the Church in all Ages, (which is all the Proof that they are capable of) I don't doubt but it will appear, that this *successive Order of the Clergy* is founded on the same Evidence, and supported by as great Authority, so that it must be thought of the same Moment with these Things by all unprejudic'd Persons.

For, my Lord, tho' it be not expressly said that there shall *always* be a *Succession of episcopal Clergy*, yet it is a Truth founded in Scripture it self, and asserted by the universal Voice of Tradition in the first and succeeding Ages of the Church.

It is thus founded in Scripture: There we are taught that the Priesthood is a *positive Institution*; that no Man can take this Office unto himself; that neither our Saviour himself, nor his Apostles, nor any other Person, however extraordinarily endow'd with Gifts from God, could, *as such*, exercise the priestly Office, till they had God's express Commission for that Purpose. Now how does it appear, that the Sacraments are positive Institutions, but that they are consecrated to such Ends and Effects, as of themselves they were no way qualified to perform? Now as it appears from Scripture that Men, *as such*, however endow'd, were not qualified to take this Office upon them without God's Appointment; it is demonstratively certain, that Men so call'd are as much to be esteem'd a *positive Institution*, as Elements so chosen can be call'd a *positive Institution*. All the personal Abilities of Men conferring no more Authority to exercise the Office of a Clergyman, than the natural Qualities of Water to make a Sacrament:
So

So that the one Institution is as truly positive as the other.

Again, The Order of the Clergy is not only a *positive* Order instituted by God, but the different Degrees in this Order is of the same Nature. For we find in Scripture, that some Persons could perform some Offices in the Priesthood, which neither Deacons nor Priests could do, tho' those Deacons and Priests were inspir'd Persons, and Workers of Miracles. Thus *Timothy* was sent to ordain Elders, because none below his Order, who was a Bishop, could perform that Office. *Peter* and *John* laid their Hands on baptiz'd Persons, because neither Priests nor Deacons, tho' Workers of Miracles, could execute that Part of the sacerdotal Office.

How can we imagine that the Apostles and Bishops thus distinguish'd themselves for nothing? That there was the same Power in *Deacons* and *Priests* to execute those Offices, tho' they took them to themselves? No, my Lord; if three Degrees in the Ministry are instituted in Scripture, we are oblig'd to think them as truly distinct in their Powers, as we are to think that the Priesthood it self contains Powers that are distinct from those of the Laity. It is no more consistent with Scripture, to say that *Deacons* or *Priests* may ordain, than that the Laity are Priests or Deacons. The same divine Institution making as truly a Difference betwixt the Clergy, as it does betwixt Clergy and Laity.

Now if the Order of the Clergy be a *divine positive* Institution, in which there are different Degrees of Power, where some alone can ordain, &c. whilst others can only perform other Parts of the sacred Office; if this (as it plainly appears) be a Doctrine of Scripture, then it is a Doctrine of Scripture, that there is a Necessity of such a Succession of Men as have Power to ordain. For do the Scriptures make it necessary that *Timothy* (or some Bishop) should be

sent to *Ephesus* to ordain Priests, because the Priests who were there could not ordain? And do not the same Scriptures make it as necessary, that *Timothy's* Successor be the only Ordainer, as well as he was in his Time? Will not Priests in the next Age be as destitute of the Power of ordaining, as when *Timothy* was alive? So that since the Scriptures teach, that *Timothy*, or Persons of his Order, could *alone* ordain in that Age, they as plainly teach, that the Successors of that Order can *alone* ordain in any Age, and consequently the Scriptures plainly teach a Necessity of an *episcopal Succession*.

The Scriptures declare there is a Necessity of a divine Commission to execute the Office of a Priest; they also teach, that this Commission can only be had from particular Persons: Therefore the Scriptures plainly teach, there is a Necessity of a *Succession of such particular Persons*, in order to keep up a truly *commission'd Clergy*.

Suppose when *Timothy* was sent to *Ephesus* to ordain Elders, the Church had told him, We have chose Elders already, and laid our Hands upon them; that if he alone was allowed to exercise this Power, it might seem as if he alone had it; or that Ministers were the better for being ordain'd by his particular Hands; and that some Persons might imagine they could have no Clergy, except they were ordain'd by him, or some of his Order; and that seeing Christ had no where made an express Law, that such Persons should be necessary to the Ordination of the Clergy; therefore they rejected this Authority of *Timothy*, lest they should subject themselves to *Niceties* and *Trifles*.

Will your Lordship say, that such a Practice would have been allow'd of in the *Ephesians*? Or that Ministers so ordained would have been receiv'd as the Ministers of Christ? If not, why must such Practice or such Ministers be allow'd of in any After-ages?

ages? Would not the same Proceeding against any of *Timothy's Successors* have deserv'd the same Censure, as being equally unlawful? If therefore the Scripture condemns all Ordination but what is episcopal, the Scriptures make a *Succession of episcopal Ordainers* necessary. So that I hope, my Lord, we shall be no more told that this is a Doctrine not mention'd in Scripture, or without any Foundation in it.

The great Objection to this Doctrine is, that this *episcopal Order of the Clergy* is only an apostolical Practice; and seeing all apostolical Practices are not binding to us, sure this need not.

In Answer to this, my Lord, I shall first shew, that tho' all apostolical Practices are not necessary, yet some may be necessary. *Secondly*, That the divine unalterable Right of Episcopacy is not founded *merely* on apostolical Practice.

To begin with the *first*; The Objection runs thus, *All apostolical Practices are not unalterable or obligatory to us, therefore no apostolical Practices are.* This, my Lord, is just as theological, as if I should say all Scripture-Truths are not Articles of Faith, or Fundamentals of Religion, therefore no Scripture-Truths are: Is not the Argument full as just and solid in one Case as the other? May there not be the same Difference between some Practices of the Apostles and others, that there is betwixt some Scripture-Truths and others? Are all Truths equally important that are to be found in the Bible? Why must all Practices be of the same Moment that were apostolical? Now if there be any Way, either divine or human, of knowing an Article of Faith, from the smallest Truth, or most indifferent Matter in Scripture, they will equally assist us in distinguishing what apostolical Practices are of perpetual Obligation, and what are not. But it is a strange Way of Reasoning, that some People are fallen into, who seem to know nothing of *Moderation*, but jump as constantly out of one Extream

stream into another, as if there was no such Thing as a middle Way, or any such Virtue as *Moderation*. Thus either the Church must have an *absolute uncontrollable Authority*, or none at all ; we must either hold all apostolical Practices necessary, or *none at all*.

Again, If no apostolical *Practices* can be unalterable, because all are not, then no apostolical *Doctrines* are necessary to be taught in all Ages, because all apostolical *Doctrines* are not ; and we are no more oblig'd to teach the *Death, Satisfaction, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, than we are oblig'd to forbid the *eating of Blood and Things strangled*. If we must thus blindly follow them in all their Practices, or else be at Liberty to leave them in all, we must for the same Reason implicitly teach all their *Doctrines*, or else have a Power of receding from them all.

For if there be any Thing in the Nature of *Doctrines*, in the *Tenor* of Scripture, or the *Sense* of Antiquity, whereby we can know the Difference of some *Doctrines* from others, that some were *occasional temporary* Determinations, suited to particular States and Conditions in the Church, whilst others were such general *Doctrines* as would concern the Church in all States and Circumstances ; if there can be this Difference betwixt apostolical *Doctrines*, there must necessarily be the same Difference betwixt apostolical *Practices*, unless we will say, that their *Practices* were not suited to their *Doctrines*. For occasional *Doctrines* must produce occasional *Practices*.

Now may not we be oblig'd by some *Practices* of the Apostles, where the Nature of the Thing, and the Consent of Antiquity, shew it to be equally necessary and important in all Ages and Conditions of the Church, without being ty'd down to the strict Observance of every Thing which the Apostles did, tho' it plainly appears that it was done upon *accidental* and *mutable* Reasons? Can we not be oblig'd to observe the *Lord's Day* from apostolical *Practice*, without

without being equally oblig'd to *lock the Doors* where we are met, because in the Apostles Time they lock'd them for Fear of their Enemies.

My Lord, we are to follow the *Practices* of the Apostles, as we ought to follow every Thing else, with *Discretion* and *Judgment*, and not run headlong into every Thing they did, because they were Apostles, or yet think that because we need not practise after them in every Thing, we need do it in nothing. We best imitate them, when we act upon such Reasons as they acted upon, and neither make their *occasional Practices perpetual Laws*, nor break through such general Rules as will always have the *same Reason* to be observ'd,

If it be ask'd how we can know what Practices must be observ'd, and what may be laid aside? I answer, as we know *Articles* of Faith from *lesser Truths*; as we know *occasional Doctrines* from *perpetual Doctrines*; that is, from the *Nature* of the Things, from the *Tenor* of Scripture, and the *Testimony* of Antiquity.

Secondly, It is not true, that the *divine unalterable Right* of Episcopacy is founded *merely* upon apostolical Practice.

We do not say that Episcopacy cannot be changed *merely* because we have apostolical Practice for it, but because such is the Nature of the Christian Priesthood, that it can only be continu'd in that Method, which God has appointed for its Continuance. Thus Episcopacy is the *only* instituted Method of continuing the Priesthood; therefore Episcopacy is *unchangeable*, not because it is an apostolical Practice, but because the Nature of the Thing requires it: A positive Institution being only to be continu'd in that Method which God has appointed; so that it is the Nature of the Priesthood, and not the apostolical Practice alone, that makes it necessary to be continued. The apostolical Practice indeed shews, that
Epif-

Episcopacy is the Order that is appointed, but it is the Nature of the Priesthood that assures us that it is *unalterable*: And that because an Office which is of no Significancy, but as it is of divine Appointment, and instituted by God, can no otherwise be continu'd but in that Way of Continuance which God has appointed.

The Argument proceeds thus: The Christian Priesthood is a divine positive Institution, which as it could only begin by the *divine Appointment*, so it can only descend to After-ages in such a Method as God has been pleased to appoint.

The Apostles (and your Lordship owns, Christ was in *all* that they did*) instituted Episcopacy *alone*, therefore this Method of Episcopacy is unalterable, not because an *apostolical Practice* cannot be laid aside, but because the Priesthood can only descend to After-ages in such a Method as is of divine Appointment.

So that the Question is not fairly stated, when it is ask'd whether Episcopacy, being an apostolical Practice, may be laid aside? But it should be ask'd whether an instituted particular Method of continuing the Priesthood be not necessary to be continued? Whether an appointed Order of receiving a Commission from God be not necessary to be observ'd, in order to receive a Commission from him? If the Case was thus stated, as it ought, to be fairly stated, any one would soon perceive, that we can no more lay aside Episcopacy, and yet continue the Christian Priesthood, than we can alter the Terms of Salvation, and yet be in Covenant with God.

I come now, my Lord, to the second Objection, *That this uninterrupted Succession is subject to so great Uncertainty, that if it be necessary, we can never say that we are in the Church.*

I know no Reason, my Lord, why it is so uncertain, but because it is founded upon *historical Evidence*.

* Answer to Dr. Snape.

dence. Let it therefore be consider'd, my Lord, that Christianity it self is a *Matter of Fact* only convey'd to us by *historical Evidence*.

That the *Canon of Scripture* is only made known to us by *historical Evidence*; that we have no other Way of knowing what Writings are the Word of God; and yet the Truth of our Faith, and every other Means of Grace depends upon our Knowledge and Belief of the Scriptures. Must we not declare the Necessity of the Succession of Bishops, because it can only be prov'd by *historical Evidence*, and that for such a long Tract of Time?

Why then do we declare the Belief of the Scriptures necessary to Salvation? Is not this equally putting the Salvation of Men upon a *Matter of Fact*, supported only by *historical Evidence*, and making it depend upon Things done seventeen hundred Years ago? Cannot *historical Evidence* satisfy us in one Point, as well as in the other? Is there any Thing in the Nature of this Succession, that it can't be as well asserted by *historical Evidence*, as the Truth of the Scriptures? Is there not the same bare Possibility in the Thing it self, that the Scriptures may in some important Points be corrupted, as that this Succession may be broke? But is this any just Reason why we should believe, or fear, that the Scriptures are corrupted, because there is a physical Possibility of it, tho' there is all the Proof that can be requir'd of the contrary? Why then must we set aside the Necessity of this Succession from a *bare Possibility* of Error, tho' there is all the Proof that can be requir'd, that it never was broken, but strictly kept up?

And tho' your Lordship has told the World so much of the *Improbability*, *Nonsense*, and *Absurdity* of this Succession, yet I promise your Lordship an Answer whenever you shall think fit to shew, *when*, or *how*, or *where*, this Succession broke, or seem'd to break, or was *likely* to break.

And

And till then, I shall content my self with offering this Reason to your Lordship, why it is *morally impossible* it ever should have broken in all that Term of Years, from the Apostles to the present Times.

The Reason is this; it has been a receiv'd Doctrine in every Age of the Church, that no Ordination was valid but that of Bishops: This Doctrine, my Lord, has been a constant Guard upon the *episcopal Succession*; for seeing it was universally believ'd that Bishops *alone* could ordain, it was *morally impossible* that any Persons could be receiv'd as Bishops, who had not been so ordain'd.

Now is it not *morally impossible* that in our Church any one should be made a Bishop without *episcopal Ordination*? Is there any Possibility of forging Orders, or stealing a Bishoprick by any other Stratagem? No, it is *morally impossible*, because it is an acknowledg'd Doctrine amongst us, that a Bishop can only be ordain'd by Bishops. Now as this Doctrine must necessarily prevent any one being a Bishop without *episcopal Ordination* in our Age, so it must have the same Effect in every other Age as well as ours; and consequently it is as reasonable to believe that the Succession of Bishops was not broke in any Age since the Apostles, as that it was not broke in our own Kingdom within these forty Years. For the same Doctrine which preserves it forty Years, may as well preserve it forty hundred Years, if it was equally believ'd in all that Space of Time. That this has been the constant Doctrine of the Church, I presume your Lordship will not deny; I have not here enter'd into the historical Defence of it; this and indeed every other Institution of the Christian Church having been lately so well defended from the ecclesiastical Records by a very excellent and judicious Writer.*

* *Original Draught of the Primitive Church.*

We believe the Scriptures are not corrupted, because it was always a received Doctrine in the Church that they were the *standing Rule of Faith*, and because the Providence of God may well be suppos'd to preserve such Books as were to convey to every Age the Means of Salvation. The same Reasons prove the great Improbability that this Succession should ever be broke, both because it was always against a receiv'd Doctrine to break it, and because we may justly hope the Providence of God would keep up his own Institution.

I must here observe, that tho' your Lordship often exposes the Impossibility of this Succession, yet at other times, even you your self, and your Advocates, assert it. Thus you tell us, *That the Papists have one regular Appointment or uninterrupted Succession of Bishops undefil'd with the touch of Lay-hands.**

Is this Succession then such an *improbable impossible* Thing, and yet can your Lordship assure us that it is at *Rome*; that tho' it be seventeen hundred Years old there, yet that it is a true one? Is it such *Ab-surdity*, and *Nonsense*, and every Thing that is *ridiculous*, when we lay Claim to it; and yet can your Lordship assure us that it is not only possible to be, but *actually* is in Being in the Church of *Rome*? What Arguments or Authority can your Lordship produce to shew that there is a Succession there that will not equally prove it to be here?

You assert expressly, that there is a *true Succession* there; you deny that we have it here; therefore your Lordship must mean, that we had not episcopal Ordination when we separated from the Church of *Rome*. And here the Controversy must rest betwixt you and your Adversaries, *whether we had episcopal Ordination then*; for as your Lordship has expressly affirm'd

* *Preservative*, p. 80.

affirm'd that there is this uninterrupted Succession in the Church of *Rome*, it is impossible that we should want it, unless we had not episcopal Ordination at the *Reformation*.

Whenever your Lordship shall please to appear in Defence of the *Nag's-Head Story*, or any other Pretence against our episcopal Ordination when we departed from *Rome*, we shall beg Leave to shew our selves so far true Protestants, as to answer any *Popish* Argument your Lordship can produce.

Here let the *common Sense* of the Laity be once more appeal'd to: Your Lordship tells them that an *uninterrupted Succession* is improbable, absurd, and *morally* speaking, *impossible*, and, for this Reason, they need not trouble their Heads about it; yet in another Place you positively affirm, that this true *uninterrupted Succession* is actually in the Church of *Rome*: That is, they are to despise this Succession, because it never was, or ever can be, yet are to believe that it *really* is in the *Romish* Church. My Lord, this comes very near *saying* and *unsaying*, to the great *Diversion* of the *Papists*. Must they not laugh at your Lordship's *Protestant Zeal*, which might be much better call'd the *Spirit* of Popery? Must they not be highly pleas'd with all your Banter and Ridicule upon an *uninterrupted Succession*, when they see you so kindly except theirs: And think it only *Nonsense* and *Absurdity*, when claim'd by any other Church? Surely, my Lord, they must conceive great Hopes of your Lordship, since you have here rather chose to contradict your self, than not vouch for their Succession: For you have said it is *morally impossible*, yet affirm that it is with them.

The third Objection against this *uninterrupted Succession* is this, that it is a *Popish Doctrine*, and gives *Papists Advantage* over us.

The Objection proceeds thus, We must not assert the Necessity of this Succession, because the *Papists* say

say it is only to be found with them: I might add, because some mighty zealous *Protestants* say so too.

But if this be good Argumentation, we ought not to tell the *Jews*, or *Deists*, &c. that there is any Necessity of embracing Christianity, because the *Papists* say Christians can only be saved in their Church.

Again, We ought not to insist upon a true Faith because the *Papists* say that a true Faith is only in their Communion. So that there is just as much Popery in teaching this Doctrine, as in asserting the Necessity of Christianity to a *Jew*, or the Necessity of a right Faith to a *Socinian*, &c.

I shall only trouble your Lordship with a Word or two concerning another Point in my former Letter. I there prov'd that your Lordship has put the whole of our Title to God's Favour upon Sincerity, *as such*, independent of every Thing else. That no Purity of Worship, no Excellence of Order, no Truth of Faith, no Sort of Sacraments, no Kind of Institutions, or any Church, *as such*, can help us to the least Degree of God's Favour, or give us the smallest Advantage above any other Communion. And consequently that your Lordship has set sincere *Jews*, *Quakers*, *Socinians*, *Muggletonians*, and all *Hereticks* and *Schismaticks*, upon the same Bottom, as to the Favour of God, with sincere Christians.

Upon this, my Lord, I am call'd upon to prove that these several Sorts of People can be *sincere* in your Account of Sincerity. To which, my Lord, I make this Answer, Either there are some sincere Persons among *Jews*, *Quakers*, *Socinians*, or any kind of *Hereticks* and *Schismaticks*, or there are not; if there are, your Lordship has given them the same Title to God's Favour, that you have to the sincerest Christians; if you will say there are no sincere Persons amongst any of them, then your Lord-

F

ship

ship damns them all in the Gross; for surely Corruptions in Religion, profess'd with Unfincerity, will never save People.

I have nothing to do to prove the Sincerity of any of them; if they are sincere, what I have said is true, if you will not allow them to be sincere, you condemn them all at once.

Again, I humbly suppos'd a Man might be sincere in his *religious Opinions*, tho' it might be owing to *some ill Habits*, or *something criminal* in himself, that he was fallen into such or such a Way of thinking. But it seems this is all *Contradiction*; and no Man can be sincere, who has *any Faults*, or whose *Faults* have any *Influence* upon his Way of thinking.

Your Lordship tells all the *Dissenters*, that they may be easy, if they are sincere; and that it is the only Ground for Peace and Satisfaction. But pray, my Lord, if none are to be esteem'd *sincere*, but those who have no Faults, or whose Faults have no Influence upon their Persuasions, who can be assur'd that he is *sincere*, but he that has the least Pretence to it, the *proud Pharisee*? If your Lordship or your Advocates were desir'd to prove your Sincerity, either before God or Man, it must be for these Reasons, because you have no ill Passions or Habits, no faulty Prejudices, no past or present Vices that can have any Effect upon your Minds. My Lord, as this is the only Proof that any of you could give of your own Sincerity in this Meaning of it, so the very Pretence to it would prove the Want of it.

F I N I S.